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CHARLES STANLY.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NINFA."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHARLES STANLY.

CHAPTER I.

THE melancholy scenes in which Charles had been obliged to take so prominent a part, had naturally a depressing effect upon him. Even his buoyant spirits did not rise with their usual elasticity. For the last week, he had experienced nothing but annoyances, and now he was compelled to leave Eastrow without speaking to Isabella. This was, perhaps, the most provoking circumstance of all; perhaps because the most recent.

After four years' separation, to be in the same room with her but a few minutes, and under such circumstances! No wonder that meeting left a painful impression. He had looked forward to one so different! He had

expected to see her soft cheek flush, and her mild eye kindle, as she gazed approvingly upon him. He had expected to read in her looks such delightful surprise at his improved appearance. He had so often pictured to himself her stately yet graceful form drawn up in proud consciousness, that Charles Stanly, with his good looks and superior talents, was all her own; still devoted to her. For he prized these advantages for her sake only; at least he thought so. For her sake he had improved his abilities, and especially taken pains to acquire the applomb of manner which he so much admired in her, and which he was now so proud of having acquired. He had made himself worthy of her, and he earnestly longed to draw pleasure from her smile of approval.

He was exceedingly provoked with Lady Ramsay for indulging, at his expense, her foolish taste for theatrical display. Not that he objected to ceremonial in what he considered its proper place. But that he and Isabella should have been brought together in the midst of a funereal pageant, appeared to him highly inappropriate, and in execrable

taste. True, he had held his part well; thus a feeling of inward satisfaction somewhat modified his indignation against Lady Ramsay; yet, at the same time, he had observed something in Isabella's manner which damped his gratulations. A certain troublesome internal conviction told him, that Isabella's admiration of his self-possession was not so unqualified as he thought he deserved; or, rather, as he felt he did not deserve. For he could not but be aware, that, instead of overflowing with joy at the sight of Isabella, he was mostly taken up with observing and admiring his own easy and aristocratic manner, and wondering what she would think of it. Thus ran the under-current of his thoughts; thus spoke that strange mysterious voice which warns, admonishes, predicts, reveals; sometimes prompting to good, and is styled conscience; sometimes instigating to evil, and is denominated a temptation of the devil.

How we toil and struggle to explain this duality—this eternal warfare between mind and matter; between the real and ideal; between our higher and lower nature! How we labour, and to what little purpose! Suffice it

that we know as much as we ought. There are depths which we cannot sound; there are mysteries which we cannot penetrate. Why search the unfathomable? Why strain our vision and disorder our brain, by endeavouring to scan what is above and beyond us? Why seek what we cannot find, or strive to compass what we may not now comprehend, what without this trouble we shall learn but a little later? A day will come when we shall know all, and without doubt or disturbance. Yet the man who is anxious and disquieted about what he cannot know, is styled a philosopher or a sage! He should be called a curious impertinent.

Thence we chose to conclude that our hero was right, when, instead of scrutinising the hidden recesses of his heart, in order to explain his compunctious feelings, he sought rather to soothe them by a reperusal of Lord Derwent's letter. The agreeable ideas it suggested prompted Charles to pack himself up comfortably in a corner of the carriage, and unresistingly to yield to what he was pleased to term reflection—*i.e.* reverie.

Visions of future greatness floated vaguely in his mind. Throughout his life he had met

with uninterrupted prosperity. Everything had turned out better than even he, sanguine as he was, could have anticipated; there was no reason why this success might not continue. Why might not his uncle take a fancy to him, and push him forward in his profession? What was there to prevent him from making a brilliant career? With Lord Overdale's interest to back his own talents, there was no saying to what eminence he might not rise. Isabella was just the very person for an ambassador's wife. Nature had given her the noble air, the stately manner suited to diplomatic representation. He loved to think that she should thus be in her fitting element, and that he should have placed her there. Self-love heightened his love, and love hallowed his self-love. There is no such thing as entirely selfish enjoyment. There must be a warp as well as a woof, or the fabric will not hold together.

Long before Charles reached London, he had, in imagination, filled all the most prominent diplomatic posts under the British flag; and, just as he knocked at Lord Derwent's door, he had commodiously settled

himself in the splendid hotel occupied by the English embassy, Faubourg St. Honoré, Paris.

Lord Derwent's reception was extremely courteous. That great man condescended to apologise for having put Charles to inconvenience by bringing him to town. Charles of course protested that the inconvenience enhanced the pleasure of seeing so illustrious a personage. It is no wonder that they were mutually pleased with each other. Lord Derwent kindly expressed regret that he could not fulfil his promise of appointing Charles to the vacant attachéship at Paris, but added, with meaning, that he should certainly be no loser by his disappointment. Charles answered with due gratitude. It was evident that Lord Derwent intended to give him something better.

Not a little elated with the favourable impression which he was conscious of having made upon the great man, Charles sauntered along the streets; and, in excellent spirits, reached the club where he intended to breakfast. He had just time to dispose comfortably of that meal before the train, which was to take him to Overdale, should start.

"Halloo, Stanly! is that you?" exclaimed a companion, miscalled a friend, who was breakfasting on hock and soda-water. "You are the very fellow we want. I am deuced glad to see you."

Charles duly acknowledged this flattering salutation.

"Never was such luck as stumbling upon you, old boy, just in the nick of time. We've got a rowing-match, which is to come off in a couple of hours, and our best hand has been seized with a cramp, or a fit, or the devil knows what; but the upshot is that he can't row; so we're in a deuce of a mess, for if we can't get another man, the whole thing's smashed, and two or three of us have stopped in this deserted town on purpose for it. But you're a capital hand at pulling, ain't you?"

Charles had no heart to disparage his talents in that line. However, he magnanimously refused to join the party, and said he was expected at his uncle's that night.

"Confound the old bear! But he'll not hug you to death! Never be cast down; he'll not go and cut you out of his will because you did a good turn to a friend. Besides,

the estate's entailed, too, ain't it? Ay, I thought so; then he can't do you out of that, so come along at once, that's a good fellow. Make haste and finish your breakfast. I tell you, we can't do without you. I would let you off if I could, but I've been to every club in London, and not a man to be found; all gone out of town. The races are important; heavy bets on the stakes. Now, don't fight shy. What the deuce difference can *one* day make?"

This was true. It could make no difference to his uncle; and to Isabella, he had left the time of his return uncertain. At another moment Charles might perhaps have felt flattered by exaggerating the anxiety of her expectation; but with a rowing-match in perspective, it was most agreeable to recollect that Isabella had used him badly by going out without seeing him. There was something in the style of his friend's eloquence peculiarly persuasive to Charles's mind. He longed to show that he had not overrated his skill in the art of rowing. He fancied himself pulling away upon the Thames, and shooting far ahead of all his competitors. There was certainly no doubt

but that Isabella ought not to have gone out until he returned from the funeral; therefore, arriving a little later than she expected, would only be serving her right. The idea of preferring an old woman to him!

It would not do to refuse his friend—it would be unfair, unhandsome; in fact, dishonourable, since there were so many bets already made; it was, in short, one of those things that could not be done.

Fired with the lofty consciousness of justice and virtue, Charles consented to join the party. He had every reason to be satisfied with his decision; that is to say, he won the race triumphantly, and was deservedly congratulated and complimented.

He gave his friends a jolly supper. It did not break up till a late, or rather an early, hour. Charles took a short nap in his chair, and drove to the station.

It was a lovely morning. The sun shone gloriously; it was as if all nature smiled upon Charles. He was so much pleased at the way in which his time had been spent in London, that, unconscious of fatigue, he chatted away quite good-humouredly to a very plain, middle-

aged female, who sat next him in the carriage. He listened with apparent interest to an infinitude of autobiographical facts relating to matrimony in general, and her own celibacy in particular. He even went so far as to agree in her sweeping condemnation of the whole male sex, and to congratulate her upon having wonderfully and successfully preserved her state of single blessedness.

In due time he reached Felton, the station nearest Overdale. Charles sprang out of the train, utterly regardless of the middle-aged female, or her reiterated farewells, and eagerly inquired for a carriage to take him on.

There was none in readiness, and there seemed to be some difficulty in procuring one. It was a very small station, and the people not remarkable for civility. They had no idle hangers-on; they did not keep people to run messages. There were no carriages nearer than Rillington, and that was four miles off; they could not spare anybody to go that distance. Charles might walk to Rillington, or wait for the *bus*, which passed at nine in the evening. It was sometimes full, but not always, and there was another at eight in the

morning. There was no inn to afford dinner and bed; but he might sit in the waiting-room as long as he pleased.

In order to prove himself a person not to be neglected, Charles inquired, with an important air, if Lord Overdale had not sent his carriage to meet him. At this question the people stared at each other, and then at Charles, with evident mistrust. Lord Overdale never sent for strangers, they said—not he.

At last, by offering a bribe, a youth was found, willing to run four miles to the next village, and to bring back a carriage with him. Charles got terribly impatient. At such a critical moment this delay was very trying. He would willingly have walked on, but he could not leave his luggage, of which he had no inconsiderable proportion.

At the end of two interminable hours the expected vehicle arrived, but a most wretched concern it was. The wheels seemed to have disagreed among themselves, and determined to run in contrary directions. The tall coach-box looked as if it must be blown down by the first puff of wind; one horse was lame, the

other restive, and the driver showed unmistakable symptoms of inebriety.

More time was lost in loading the luggage. The coachman was obstinate, and inclined to be pugnacious. Charles's temper was severely tried; he bore the delays, however, with praiseworthy equanimity.

At last, everything was ready, and Charles fairly off. The horses could not, by any exertions, be urged faster than a walk, and that was a slow one.

But there was no other means of conveyance, so Charles was fain to make the best of it.

But for a man, just stepped out of the express, and eager to be at his journey's end, to find himself travelling at the rate of three miles an hour, not including stoppages, is a severe trial of patience.

Patient, or impatient, there was no help for it; and on they jogged for nearly two hours. Then they came to a full stop. "The horses must have something to drink," said the coachman.

Charles's temper was not improved when he perceived, that before attending to the wants of his horses, the man had been espe-

cially mindful of his own. There he stood, at a little distance from the carriage, glass in hand, holding forth to a knot of gipseys, to whom he had apparently been generous. They, too, were provided with filled glasses, and they were talking and gesticulating in the vehement manner peculiar to that people.

The coachman's provoking look of drunken beatitude put Charles quite beside himself. He sprang out of the carriage, and made for the spot where the gipseys were carousing.

It was at some yards' distance, and on his way he was stopped by a bevy of gipsey-women, who surrounded him. They said that if he would cross their hands, they would tell him his fortune, and a very pretty fortune it should be.

As he was impatiently endeavouring to rid himself of their importunities, they were called off by the shrill voice of an old crone, issuing from a dilapidated tent. The women retreated all but one, who stood confronting Charles, with an air half confused, half laughing.

Charles gazed with wonder at her extraordinary beauty. A red cloak, muffling the

under part of her face, rendered the smooth brown forehead and large mysterious eyes alone visible. Charles fancied that he had a vague recollection of these wonderful eyes; yet, once seen, could he have forgotten them?

They were all fire, and, at the same time, all languor; furtive, yet daring; tender, yet imperious. Their expression changed every moment, and so did their colour. Now, they were light and laughing; now, they shone black as night upon their background of liquid azure. Sometimes they swam sleepy and languid, sometimes they sparkled with a brightness which would have been too dazzling, had it not been tempered by the long, soft, silken lashes, and ennobled by the arched and somewhat strongly-marked eyebrows.

Charles was gazing at her with wonder and admiration, when suddenly her cloak dropped, and at the same moment her bonnet became detached. Both fell upon the ground, thus displaying a small classical head, and a figure slight, but of marvellous symmetry. She was rather below the middle height, her form aërial, yet exquisitely rounded. Though still

in the first bloom of girlhood, her marked profile exhibited a certain decision of character, an air almost of command, generally belonging only to maturer years. But the full red lips and the rounded chin, about which a thousand dimples seemed to play, were childlike in their mirthful innocence.

"Chloe!" exclaimed Charles; "are you really Chloe, or was ever likeness so deceptive?"

The pliant form was thrown back into an attitude of mock wonder, while the luxuriant tresses rolled down to her feet, waving round her like a dark cloud.

"Now, I am sure you *are* Chloe," he said, recognising the rapid kitten-like movements, and the strange, but inexpressibly graceful attitudes. He advanced to take her hand.

The smallest, whitest, most taper little hand imaginable, was raised, in a menacing gesture.

"Avaunt!" she exclaimed, with a stern frown, while the dimples round her mouth betrayed her enjoyment of Charles's perplexity. "Chloe, indeed! I answer not to so heathenish a title. Nor is Chloe the name which

should dwell in your heart, and sound upon your lips. Chloe, indeed!" She sung out the last two words in a strange wild note.

"No, that is not Chloe's voice," said Charles, half speaking to himself. "Still I fancy that I recognise some of the thrilling vibrations. In the name of Heaven, who are you?"

She begun, in a deep contralto, singing, or rather chanting:

"I am the morning star, which points where you wish to go.

"I am the familiar spirit of her you love.

"I am the light breeze, which plays round her fair temples.

"I am the lark, who carols in the early morning.

"I am the skyrocket, which bursts, and is seen no more.

"I am the dewdrop, that nestles in the fairest flower.

"I am the familiar spirit of her you love.

"I am the sunbeam, which gladdens Isabella's eyes."

"Then you *are* Chloe, or how should you know that she is Isabella?"

"I know all things—past, and future, and present. I know whence you came, and whither you are going."

"Of course you do, if you are Chloe. Yet that is not Chloe's voice; hers was a high soprano," he added, half doubtingly. She cast upon him a look, dark, preternatural, such as is said to belong peculiarly to the gipsey race, and which increased his wonder with regard to who or what the mysterious apparition really might be. Charles pulled out his purse, and held it up before her, for at the moment he half believed that she was a real gipsey.

She pushed it away contemptuously. "No, no; I don't want your gold; I have a price, but it is far higher." She seized his hand. "That ring. Give it me, and I will tell you a pretty fortune, and a true." And she begun pulling it off his finger as she spoke.

"Stay!" he said, endeavouring to extricate his hand; "not that; I cannot give you that ring; but in this purse is money enough to buy many prettier."

"I want that, and no other. It is my fancy, and I will gratify it."

"Indeed I cannot give you that ring. I promised never to part with it."

"Did ever man keep a promise?"

"Believe me, I keep mine."

She laughed scornfully, still holding his hand, while she kept playing with the ring.

Charles proceeded with increasing earnestness: "Indeed, I should like to give it you, if I might; but I cannot. You would not ask it, if you knew——"

"Because I know, I ask."

"Is a solemn vow nothing?"

"Not against eyes made to break them."

And it seemed as if her eyes flashed fire from underneath their dark lashes. She recommenced her wild chant:

"Give me the ring, and she you love shall smile upon you. Give me the ring, and she shall speak the word you like to hear." Then, suddenly changing the rhythm: "Refuse the ring, and her soft voice shall grate harshly, and you will never see her smile as of yore. Refuse the ring, and she shall not clasp you to her heart, nor return your kiss of love! Victory, victory!" she exclaimed, darting

from him, and throwing up her arms, wildly, in the air. "Believe me, I keep my promises." She mocked him to the life. "Oh, of course I believe you; here's the proof. Is this the ring you vowed never to part with?"

As she spoke, she threw it up high above her head, and caught it again with admirable dexterity.

Charles had been altogether so bewildered by her strange manner, that the ring was off his finger before he was aware of it. She had held his hand during her song, stroking it, first gently, then with more force, as she changed the measure.

She burst out laughing at his look of amazement, and between her fits of mirth, tossed up the ring, and caught it, alternately, upon each of her fingers. The various attitudes into which she threw herself as she did this feat, were singularly graceful. Charles stood gazing at her, confounded and entranced.

When she had sufficiently enjoyed his perplexity, she threw the ring at him with a scornful air. "Take it back, false traitor; take back your ring. I'll none of it. Avaunt!"

she added, as he was about to approach her; and, bounding away like a fawn, she was soon lost amid the crowd of women.

Charles followed in pursuit of her, but the women surrounded him, all eager to tell his fortune. To rid himself of them he gave them money, but in doing so he lost time, and the object of his search had escaped. He sought her vainly, and to his inquiries respecting her, the gipseys would only reply by mysterious looks and strange words, pronounced in some unintelligible language.

He knew that she could not be far off, and he did not like the idea of being baffled in his pursuit; so, despite the ominous and prohibitory gestures of the gipsey-women, he was preparing to continue his search, when he was accosted by a smart-looking post-boy, hat in hand—"Please, sir, the carriage is ready; my cattle *is* capital, sir. We shall be at Overdale in no time."

Charles was ashamed to make any objection. He could think of no plausible pretext for delay; so he followed the man, who handed him into the carriage, to which a good pair

of horses had been harnessed. The man got into his saddle, and was off.

The more Charles thought over his strange adventure, the more he was perplexed by it. All manner of wild fantasies peopled his brain, and he gave himself up unresitingly to their vain delusions. Metamorphoses and transformations more wonderful than all Ovid's put together, rose up in his mind, but all resolving themselves into that lovely form as he had last seen it darting from him, with its arms aloft, like an inspired Pythoness. She was altogether the most facinating creature he had ever beheld; the more so from a strange something that in any other he would have called repellant, but which in her was doubly attractive.

He fancied her some spell-bound damsel, whom he was destined to release. Not all the Knights of the Round Table on record, with all the *preux chevaliers* to boot, performed half the deeds of valour of which our hero, at that moment, felt himself capable. Giants and dragons were trifles; he scorned enchanters and enchantments. In short, there

would have been no end to the mighty flights of his imagination, had not the carriage stopped before a stately old-fashioned lodge.

Here was the entrance to the Overdale domain—the estate which was one day to be his own! Charles found his dreams suddenly vanish. The spell was broken. Imagination folded up her wings, and he became aware that he was a human being, and heir to a large property.

Plans of improvement suggested themselves to his mind. The lodge might, he thought, be enlarged with advantage. Neither was the gate, though handsome, exactly according to his taste. He should certainly have a new one the moment he had power to do so. The entrance he considered a matter of great importance; accordingly he determined that all the entrances to his property should be at once handsome and tasteful.

At every step he devised new plans of improvement. Not but he was exceedingly pleased with his future estate. It was to be *his*, and that was sufficient. Property asserted her rights. We none of us value a thing half as much because it is best, as because it is

ours. Our country, our house, even our wife, are appreciated, not in virtue of their intrinsic merit, but of that most inestimable one—namely, belonging to us. The reflection of our dear self is thus cast upon them. None may censure what we have chosen; it is a disparagement upon our judgment or our taste. It lowers our self-esteem. What a metamorphosis is effected upon the same object, by the prefix of meum or tuum!

Charles felt a peculiar interest in a long gloomy avenue through which he passed. The gloomy background of pine, against which the house was situated, wore, to his eyes, a bright and smiling aspect. He was deep in speculations respecting the vistas he should cut, and the probable cost of each, when the carriage drew up, under a huge heavy portico.

The post-boy dismounted, and rang a loud bell. Instantly the door flew open, and a long array of servants, in gorgeous liveries, lined the entrance-hall. One obsequious gentleman in black, and no powder, came forward, and bowing graciously, proceeded to show the way.

Charles followed him through a large hall and along an interminable gallery, lined with statues; then across a second grand lobby, then through a vast ante-room, until, having traversed labyrinthian apartments and galleries without end, he at last reached a part of the house which bore token of habitation.

An elegant suite of rooms was now thrown open; at the end of these was a small door, at which Mr. Jones (for it was that important personage) knocked.

"Come in!" said a well-known voice; and in another moment Charles had seized Isabella in his arms.

CHAPTER II.

It was with a heavy heart that Isabella had set out upon her journey. She rejoiced in the darkness which allowed her tears to flow unobserved. All night long she wept silently.

She tried to reason with herself, but in vain. She had received a shock from which she could not recover. She could not efface the impression that Charles Stanly was an altered man.

One look had sufficed. He was no longer the same generous, impulsive being from whom she had parted four years before—whom she had taken to her heart, with all his errors —whom she loved with his faults—perhaps *for* them.

He might be improved; all she knew was, that he was altered. Others might admire

the manly applomb, the diplomatic courtesy—she missed the fond reliance, the youthful waywardness. She missed his former self. What cared she whether he was improved or not, when she felt so painfully that he was "different!"

His address might be graceful and aristocratic; to her it seemed studied and artificial. His words might flow smoothly and fluently; to her they appeared cold and constrained. They were prompted by the intellect; they did not spring from the heart. He was more solicitous as to *how*, than as to *what* he should speak. It was as if all he did and said was for effect.

In that short interview, her fondest hopes had been dispersed, almost destroyed. She saw her folly, her madness of four years' standing. She had relied upon an improbability so great, that even then, in the height of her delusion, she knew the fulfilment of her hopes was next to impossible. Why had she believed what she felt was untrue? Were miracles to be performed for her? Was the order of nature to be subverted? What had she done to deserve it? She had prepared her fate, and must accept it.

The scales had fallen from her eyes. A moment had dispelled the illusion, but that moment was a lifetime of sorrow. An eternity of misery was pressed into that short span.

The hope of a joyful meeting with the man she loved, had kept up Isabella's spirits during her four long years of exile. Heedless of the weary journey through the wilderness, she had looked steadily forward towards the promised land. But now, at the end of her pilgrimage, she found not the smiling garden she had expected. A wild waste lay before her, a desert without mirage.

For hope had fled. The blank in her heart proved that the dream was over—gone for ever; and yet there were moments when it would return, like bright gleams of sunshine on a wintry day. Reason told her that these were vain—as well expect the cold beam of a short summer to dissolve the Alpine snow. But can hopes to which we have clung for long years, even though we know their fallacy, can they at once be dispelled?

Isabella exerted herself, that she might meet Chloe with apparent cheerfulness—perhaps, also, that she might cheat her own foolish h art a little longer. She greeted her

sister with smiles, and the gay Chloe was far from suspecting how much misery was hidden beneath them.

She told Chloe, what she also tried to believe, that she was suffering from fatigue only, and that all she required was rest and quiet.

Two days passed—two weary days. Charles Stanly neither wrote nor came. Isabella told Lord Overdale that he could not be expected so soon. It was, indeed, not likely that he should get away from London before the evening of the first day, but he ought to have taken the night train, and reached Overdale early next morning.

He did not arrive, however, and Lord Overdale was obliged to absent himself upon business. Isabella felt more than ever lonely at his departure. His presence was a support; she felt reliance upon him. He inspired awe, yet at the same time perfect trust.

It seemed to Isabella as if ages had intervened since she last saw Charles Stanly. In these two days she had lived years, long years of suffering. She felt as if she had grown older—time had leaped forwards; whereas it

had stood still during her sojourn in Italy. Those years had been a blank in her life, a paralysis of existence, a state of morbid depression, which when passed is forgotten. But the last two days were fraught with acute pain, such as can never be effaced. Nothing is so relative as time. There are years which pass like brief moments, moments comprehending cycles of years.

Although Isabella had said that she did not expect Charles to arrive on the first day of her return to Overdale, she started at every sound she heard. On the following morning she resumed her usual occupations with her sister. She forced herself to read and write as usual; but Chloe perceived her absence of mind, and saw that she would feel relieved by being left to herself. Moreover, Chloe was deprived, by Lord Overdale's absence, of her usual pastime —teazing and pleasing him; so she bethought herself of playing off some of her droll but mischievous tricks, and took the first opportunity of escaping, that she might, to use her own expression, *get up some fun.*

As soon as Chloe had left her, Isabella relinquished her ineffectual attempt at self-

delusion. She laid down her book, and yielded to anxious watching.

But when at length she heard a bustle in the house, she would not let herself think what its cause might be. She snatched up her book, and forced herself to read. Steps sounded nearer and nearer. She tried to believe that it was Lord Overdale unexpectedly returning. She would not let herself watch the approaching sounds; indeed, she could not distinguish them, for the beating of her heart seemed so much louder. The door opened. A mist was before her eyes.

Could it indeed be true? Was it no illusion? Was he again beside her—he—her own Charles Stanly—the same as ever? She heard the old soft whisper; she saw the old fond look. She gazed at the handsome face beaming down upon her with the old devotion. There are moments of joy which wipe out years of sorrow.

It was too much happiness—felicity too intense for earth. Its excess was overpowering; and for a time she could not realise it. She was like a prisoner suddenly removed

from a dark cell, blinded by the daylight, to which he has long been unaccustomed.

How familiar was every gesture, every expression, every intonation!—how familiar, yet how strange! In absence, he had always been before her mind; but now, when beside her, she doubted of his presence.

Now she acknowledged to herself the doubts and fears which had harassed her during these last miserable days; she might acknowledge them now that they were over. She dwelt upon them, and tried to exaggerate their extent, that she might chide herself for having ventured to conceive them.

With what pleasure she upbraided her folly, her want of trust! With what joy she discovered that it must have been her coldness that had induced his. It must have been the unmeaning pageantry with which they were surrounded at Eastrow, that had reflected itself upon her mind, and upon her manner, and her constraint must have reacted upon him. Was this not plain, now that she saw his features light up with their old expression? Yes, he was again his kind, affectionate self.

Their long silence spoke volumes. Isabella's first word was a sigh. A sigh of relief and of rapture.

"What a pretty hand this is!" said Charles, as he seized the delicate fingers that stroked back the rich brown waves which had fallen forwards upon his forehead as he stooped over her. "What a pretty hand it is! how white, and how transparent!"

She sighed again, but this time her sigh had a different meaning. It was full of sadness.

He had not perceived that his ring was no longer upon her finger. The gloomy forebodings which had assailed her, as she saw the ring lie broken at her feet, returned upon her. The blood forsook her cheek, and she could hardly command her voice as she spoke with ill-assumed indifference of manner:

"You should rather say how thin! I am altogether much thinner, much altered, I fear, since you last saw me."

The expression of his eyes gradually changed. The affection faded into surprise; and this again was succeeded by a look of regret.

Isabella was, no doubt, much altered. Her

features, naturally high, seemed now prominent. Her cheeks had lost their roundness. Her complexion, though still white as alabaster, had not the lustre of health. In short, she looked pale and careworn. The traces of illness, mental or bodily, were visible upon her lofty and queen-like features. Her form was still majestic, and its outlines noble, but it was not the perfect cameo. She was now too thin for that exquisite symmetry of proportion so beautiful and so rare; and her hair, less luxuriant than it formerly was, no longer furnished the rich diadem that used to encircle her head, and had added so materially to its classical character.

Charles wondered why he had not observed this striking change before, and he was not a little provoked at having his attention directed to it. At Eastrow he had thought most of himself. Now, in the first flush of pleasure at Isabella's kind reception, he only saw her as she formerly was. He overlooked the image before him, to dwell upon that of perfect beauty as first engraven upon his mind, and embellished during absence by the magic colouring of fancy. Isabella's words

at once dissolved the illusion. He went from one extreme to the other, and saw more than the reality. He feared that she was not simply looking ill, but that she was utterly changed; that the beauty of which he was so proud had vanished for ever. It was a terrible discovery for so devoted an admirer of outward appearance as Charles. He was half angry with Isabella for being altered, and quite angry with her for having made him notice the alteration. Why could she not have let him remain in ignorance of so disagreeable a truth? At all events, she might have allowed him to deceive himself a little longer; she should have kept up his spirits till he had got over the dreaded meeting with his uncle, which floated before his mind like a menacing phantom. It was really very provoking to be put out of conceit, just at the moment when he had most occasion for courage and address.

Some such feelings as these rose in his mind indistinctly, but not the less unpleasantly. He felt that he ought to say something in contradiction to Isabella's words, but his own feelings confirmed them too strongly. He

attempted to speak, then hesitated and paused, and remained gazing fixedly at her.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" said Isabella, with a melancholy shake of the head. "I thought I knew all your looks by heart, but that one is a stranger. I never saw it before." Then forcing a smile, but tears were in her voice, she added, "Better not examine too closely; the result will not be satisfactory."

"No, no, do not say that," he replied, though his tone contradicted his words.

She partly guessed what was passing in his mind. "I should be ashamed to tell you how much I have been annoyed by the alteration in my looks," she said, with great simplicity; "but the fact is, I was hardly myself aware of it till the other day. When I was in London I met Mr. Preston, Lady Ramsay's protégé, and would you believe it? he actually did not recognise me, and then I wondered what *you* would think of me, and began to fear——"

"Oh no, Isabella," interrupted Charles, "you have no cause for fear. If I know my-

self at all, I may say that I attach as little importance to outward appearance as any man. And, after all, the difference is not so great. You are thinner, certainly, but, as for not knowing you again—that is utterly absurd."

"Thank you, Charles," she replied, gently, but with a touching sadness in her tone. "You are very kind to speak as you do. I have suffered a good deal since I last saw you; and sorrow will, sooner or later, tell its tale. However," she added, more cheerfully, "it is folly to regret what cannot be remedied; besides, I shall soon get well and strong, now that you are come back; and who knows but that my looks may improve as well as my health, and if not, Charles——" She hesitated, and cast down her eyes, blushing.

"It is all one to me," he put in warmly, as he gazed at her with unfeigned admiration, for the blush which modesty called into her cheek lent her, for the moment, both youth and beauty. "I don't care for mere personal attractions; and if I did, yours are sufficient for me, or any man. You look beautiful, Isabella. I don't think I ever saw you look more beautiful."

Isabella perceived that he was sincere, and, gaining courage from this conviction, she put her hand confidingly in his.

"You are partial," she said; "but I see you believe what you say. In your eyes, perhaps, I may still look well, and I care little what others think of me. Now that my fears on that score are over—if I ever really had any—I must say a word to you. I could not do it before, but I think I can now that I am more satisfied with regard to——" She paused, hesitating.

"What can you mean, Isabella?" he inquired, nervously.

"Charles, do you remember the old promise?" She spoke in a whisper.

"Promise! what promise? I remember no promise. What do you mean?"

"Have you really forgotten it?" she asked, with surprise, half sorrowful, half pleasurable. "Have you forgotten our promise of four years' standing? Do you not remember what you said then—when we parted?"

Charles shook his head, but did not speak. A vague fear of something disagreeable took

possession of his mind. He dreaded what was to come.

"You surely must remember," she resumed, "that we agreed, or rather indeed, that I insisted—for you would hardly give the promise, but you *did* promise—that our engagement should not be considered indissolubly binding; that if anything should occur——"

He interrupted her eagerly. "But nothing has occurred. What on earth should have occurred? You frightened me with your long preamble. Our engagement is binding, shall be binding. What could have put it into your head to think otherwise?" He spoke with an uneasy sort of irritable trepidation, betrayed by an impatient gesture of the hand.

"Hear me to an end," she continued; "hear me patiently to an end. What I have to say must be said one day or other, and had best be said now. Delay would only make such a disclosure more painful." Again she hesitated for a moment; then summoning her resolution, she went on, firmly: "What I mean, is simply this: There are so many circumstances which we cannot foresee, so many

feelings which we cannot control; human nature is, in short, so prone to change, that it is foolish to rely too implicitly upon the future, and very unjust to repine if things turn out otherwise than we wish. Now, if the hopes I cherished four years ago have not been fulfilled, if your feelings towards me have undergone any change, oh! dear Charles! I beseech you, say so at once. We may not be suited to each other—you know I used to fear it. If you have any doubts on the subject, tell me them plainly—I could bear to hear it now—I am prepared for it." She looked in his face with an expression of wistful and anxious love. Unutterable tenderness was in her eyes, but her voice was steady as she added: "And your uncle shall not know what has passed—he shall never blame you. I will take all upon myself. I will let him infer——"

"Oh, Isabella!" Charles exclaimed, roused to enthusiasm by her generosity, "how can you speak thus? You distress me; you cut me to the heart. I cannot bear you to think so ill of me. What have I done to forfeit your good opinion? I am a foolish fellow, a

very foolish fellow, I know it, but I am not false, I am not base—indeed, indeed my heart is true. It is yours—it has always been yours, and yours only. If you do not believe my words—if you have lost your trust in my honour—if you despise me—then, indeed——"

"Stay, you mistake me altogether. It is because I trust you, that I speak as I do. It is because I trust in your honour, that I expect and believe you will tell me truth, and I think I have a right to claim it." Her voice was very gentle, but very firm.

Charles was assailed by a strange variety of complicated feelings. He admired Isabella's decision and self-possession; he saw that she had strength to give him up, yet he saw, at the same time, what anguish it would cost her. Though half displeased at her readiness to make the sacrifice, he saw its immensity, and this flattered him. These thoughts, together with an undefined dread of a rupture with his uncle, combined themselves into one prominent feeling, the fear of losing Isabella; and he said, with earnestness:

"Why are the words you write so much

kinder than those you speak? Remember your last letter. I believed it to be true."

Isabella was now afraid that he might think she alluded to the unfortunate Richmond adventure, and its melancholy result. She had at the moment totally forgotten it. She was angry with herself for reminding him of anything so painful. Moreover, his eyes expressed such intense anxiety for her favour, such an ardent desire to be believed, that her fears once more vanished.

To reassure him, was now her only thought. She allowed her soft blue eyes to rest upon his face, with their deep, earnest look of affection.

There was a momentary silence. Then, in a voice tremulous with emotion, she said: "Oh, I believe you—I cannot help believing you. All I meant to say was, that in these moments, when 'words are things,' when happiness and misery are in the scales, a look, a sound, falsely interpreted, may destroy the peace of a whole lifetime; for a promise, kept against the will, is more than broken; but enough of this, dear Charles. You know,"

she added, "that extremes meet, and that hope and fear may thus produce similar effects. I leave you to guess which of these made me speak as I have now done."

Her manner became cheerful. They talked over old times, and recapitulated much which had occurred during their separation. Every word Isabella spoke revealed the deep earnestness of her character; a character at once simple and profound; full of feeling, yet free from passion. It was this rare combination which he used so much to admire; but strangely enough, the repose of manner in which he formerly delighted, now produced upon him an uncomfortable sensation. Now that he had himself gained self-possession and composure, he no longer required them in her. The equanimity, so fascinating to him when a very young man, because it lent to his inexperience the self-reliance he wanted, fretted him with an obtrusive sense of his own inferiority. He could not but perceive that her calmness was natural, therefore always graceful; whereas his, being acquired, sat uneasily upon him, and was difficult to keep up.

Charles was also terribly annoyed at the

alteration in her looks. Now that the soft blush which a few moments ago lit up her cheek and gave lustre to her eye had passed away, she looked ill and exhausted. To his eye especially, she had lost much of her beauty. Some people might have thought it heightened by the shadowy, spiritual character it had acquired; he only saw that her form had lost its full, stately proportions. He was now old enough to appreciate the undefined and indefinable charm of extreme youth, to which, when himself younger, he had been insensible. He had often boasted of her beauty to his friends, and he felt its loss as a personal insult to himself.

The more Isabella betrayed her unsuspicious trustfulness in him, the more he was sensible of not deserving it. Thus the nicely-poised equilibrium of his vanity was disturbed; in plain English, she had put him out of conceit with himself.

The natural result of these feelings was to find fault with the person who inspired them; or if real faults could not be found, to look out for imaginary ones.

Accordingly, Charles began to discern that

there was something formal in the dignity of Isabella's manners. He remembered all Lady Ramsay's suggestions and insinuations. They weighed with him as they had never done before. Isabella's soft voice now struck him as affected; her slow enunciation seemed tedious. He could not help interrupting her, and finishing her sentences for her, but his words were not happily chosen; he never rightly guessed what she was going to say. It was evident that their ideas were no longer in unison, and this discovery increased his annoyance.

A variety of conflicting emotions not yet shaped into thought, floated vaguely in his mind, and made him preoccupied and inattentive. He had hardly patience to listen to her account of the misery she had suffered during the four long years of their separation. "Why dwell upon what is disagreeable when it is over?" he said, with ill-suppressed irritation.

"To enhance our happiness, and make us thankful for it."

"I am thankful enough without the aid of unpleasant reminiscences; let us try to forget the wretched past."

"No, I like to recal it. The recollection ought to make us wiser and better. Yet, after all," she added, musingly, "I believe we are best when we are happiest. We certainly are wisest. Do you know I was getting quite a fool about you. If you had stayed away much longer, I believe I should have become a perfect idiot. I was beginning already to put faith in omens and presages. I should be ashamed of telling you——"

"Did any predictions come true?" he inquired, abruptly.

"On the contrary, all my fears have proved false, for I find you the same as ever."

"Thank you, Isabella."

"How true it is, that 'great ills medicine the less.' I remember how terrified I used to be at Eastrow, when you stayed out only a very little later than usual. I used to fancy that all sorts of disasters had befallen you, and thought myself greatly to be pitied. But since that time, I have learnt that such sorrows were luxuries. There is but one real misfortune—absence."

"And that is over now, thank God; so let us think and talk no more about it."

"Now you are again with me, I shall have time to think a little of other people, and take interest in their concerns. On the whole, I see that sorrow makes us much more selfish than joy. While you were absent, my heart was so filled by your image, that it had room for nothing else. The whole world beside was no more to me than——"

"A confounded bore," interrupted Charles. "Well, and it was just the same to me," he added, as if desirous to get rid of the subject.

"A landscape without sunshine—flat, dull, and dreary—oh, how dreary!" she added, shuddering, and as if speaking to herself.

Charles was, no doubt, touched by the extreme tenderness of her expressions; he felt that he ought in duty to respond by similar protestations of affection; but the notion of its being a duty, prevented him from fulfilling it. Yet, it was necessary to say something. He began one or two awkward phrases, but his expressions were either too cold, or too exaggerated. He was provoked at his own inability to find the words he wanted. It is easy enough to express what we feel, or to assume what we do not feel, provided we know

what our feelings are; but, at the present moment, Charles was in strange bewilderment as to the nature of his.

He made various ineffectual attempts to form sentences independently of ideas. Isabella perceived his confusion, and came to his assistance, by changing the subject.

"You are an undutiful nephew, Charles," she said, attempting to jest. "You have been upwards of an hour in the house, without even inquiring after your uncle."

"Your presence is sufficient excuse for any forgetfulness," he replied, with an attempt at gallantry, which was about as successful as her assumed mirth. "But tell me, how, and where, is my beloved uncle?"

"He is not at home; he went yesterday upon business to Edinburgh, but is expected to return again to-morrow. My mother and Chloe are, as you know, here, and we will do our best, between us, to entertain you."

"It would be very kind of you to give me some hints about my uncle, and to tell me how I should behave in order to please him."

"You must find that out for yourself. Lord Overdale is so exceedingly strange, in his

notions and in his ways, that it is utterly impossible to guess what will, or will not, please him. He is the oddest being I ever met with."

"How do you mean? Give me an instance of his oddity, and I may perhaps get a clue for my behaviour."

"His conduct towards you, ever since your birth, has been so odd, that I should think you required nothing more to prove that he is unlike every other human creature. Yet, eccentric as he is, there is in his character a lofty grandeur which commands respect, almost reverence. His mind is of a very superior order, and I often fancy that the excessive sternness of his outward manner is assumed, in order to conceal a tenderness of which he is ashamed. This is the only way in which I can account for the extraordinary fancy he has taken to my sister."

"Yes, I heard of that in London. Who knows but he may adopt her, and leave her some of his money."

"He would rather marry her, I believe, if——"

"Marry her! You don't mean that! How

absurd! At his age! He would surely never be guilty of such egregious folly?"

"I think he would. Her influence over him is immense. And yet he sees through her character. I believe that he is quite aware that she is only amusing herself, and trifling with him!"

"He marry her! What an odious girl she must be."

"No, only a flirt—but I am sorry to say, that she is a sad flirt."

"A heartless coquette, you mean—I beg your pardon for speaking thus of your sister; but I have a special horror of coquettes. They are all false and designing!"

"When you know Chloe, your horror will diminish, if it does not vanish altogether. There never was a creature so fascinating; her very faults have about them a charm, which is almost magical."

"*Apropos* of magic, and the magical, I had an odd adventure on my way here."

"An adventure! What was it?"

"It was enough to make one believe in witchcraft. By Jove! the more I think of it, the more singular it appears."

"I am getting very curious."

"The horses I got at the station, knocked up at Rillington, or whatever may be the name of the village about four miles from hence, you know——" He paused, and hesitated.

"Yes, yes, I know. But your adventure?"

Somehow he felt ashamed of telling it; however, he had gone too far to recede, so he cleared his throat two or three times, and proceeded in a determined manner:

"While I was waiting for fresh horses, I met with some gipseys; one of them——"

"Told you your fortune, I suppose?"

"I never saw so beautiful a creature in all my life," he proceeded, rather thinking aloud, than addressing himself to Isabella. "There was something about her quite wonderful, absolutely preternatural. I can compare her to nothing I ever saw before. She reminded me of those lines of Tasso—'*Tra giovane, e funciallo età confine. Prese, ed ornò di raggi il biondo crine.*' I expected to see the white wings bordered with gold, un-

fold themselves, and bear her above a world, which did not seem made for such a being—I expected—— But, merciful powers! What is that? Am I awake? or am I dreaming?"

He seemed suddenly changed into stone. He turned pale as ashes, and stood staring straight before him, as if appalled by some frightful apparition.

Yet the apparition was anything but frightful. In the mirror fronting Charles, was reflected an image of surpassing loveliness. Chloe had entered the room by a door just opposite to it. She stood for a moment upon the threshold, enjoying his confusion; in another she was by his side.

"Do you not know me again? or have you not yet decided what I am? Am I the evening breeze, or the morning mist? Am I the watery bubble, or the fiery spark?—or am I a wicked little sprite, whose delight is to unmask false lovers——? Don't be alarmed," she added, laughing archly—"I can be a good little fairy too—and for once, I won't tell tales."

As she spoke, she performed, close before

his eyes, a variety of strange cabalistic passes. Charles remained as if transfixed, and unable to utter a word.

Chloe could contain herself no longer. She burst into a violent fit of merriment. "I beg your pardon," she said, "but you do look so bewildered, so funny!"

"What have you been doing? you naughty Chloe!" said Isabella, unable to resist the contagious laughter. "What tricks have you been playing off upon poor Charles?"

"Such fun! such fun!" Chloe sprang up in the air with delight. "What do you think, Isabella?" she proceeded, with childish glee. "I rode over to Rillington, for I had a presentiment that he would come to-day; and I dressed up as a gipsey; and only imagine! he really took me for one, and believed all the nonsense I told him. And did you actually think my fingers were used to nasty tinkering work? Fie, fie! you ought to be ashamed of yourself." And she recommenced her cabalistic passes, as she looked at Charles with a droll expression, half amused, half offended.

In moving her small hands backwards and

forwards, she inadvertently touched the ends of his hair. The slight contact acted like an electric shock. A flash shot across his eyes, and he could hardly restrain an exclamation.

"My own dear boy! and only to think of it. I mean your being here, and my not having found it out; that is, if it *is* you, which I almost doubt, because—so many things happen to me, that I really sometimes am puzzled to know whether I'm myself or not; and, indeed, if you only knew what I won't tell you, you'd never believe it at all, so it's just providential, and—don't you think so yourself?" Having thus happily succeeded in finding a termination to her sentence, the widow threw herself into Charles's arms with an impetuosity which, at any other moment, would have been far from acceptable.

On the present occasion, however, he hailed her advent with delight. Any diversion to his feelings was acceptable, and he responded to the old lady's words with a fluent incoherence, which was especially grateful to her, as being liable to any interpretation she might happen to fancy.

The widow chattered and laughed in her most extravagant manner. At last her happiness exhaled itself in tears.

"It's all joy. It's my way. I don't defend it. Others may do as they like. I like to be pleased and happy. It may be absurd, but I really can't help it; and I like to see everybody pleased and happy, though I'm sure I've had enough to make me miserable—never was anybody so unfortunate. I must be sadly changed since I saw you, especially my eyes, which I'm obliged to bathe six times a day with prussic acid. By-the-by, I've not yet thought of them all day, so I'll go and bathe them now." With these words she left the room.

"Your mother is more mysterious than ever," said Charles. "What is the matter with her eyes? and what is the wonderful thing that she will not tell me?"

Chloe burst out laughing. Isabella interposed, and related that the old lady's eyes had remained weak ever since her illness, and that she was ordered to bathe them with a lotion containing a small quantity of prussic acid.

"And she thinks that the name itself is

poisonous, and she takes such care of the bottle that she is always leaving it about. I do believe somebody will get poisoned with it some day. After all, it would be an expeditious death." She paused for a moment, and then ran on in the same gay strain: "But of all the funny fancies that mamma ever got into her head, what should you think of——"

"Oh, never mind that nonsense," interrupted Isabella.

"Indeed, I must tell it," said Chloe. "It's too good to be lost! It is the drollest fancy! and I put it into her head."

"Let me tell the story, Chloe," again interrupted Isabella. And she related the delusion under which her mother was, with regard to Lord Overdale's attentions and intentions. Isabella, while she condemned Chloe, told the story so as least to expose her, for, considering the abhorrence of her character which Charles had so lately expressed, she dreaded lest this last trait should entirely ruin her sister in his estimation.

It was, therefore, with no small astonishment that Isabella, when she had concluded her narration, heard him say, thoughtfully:

"After all, I see no particular harm in the joke. You are too severe, Isabella."

"Isabella is not too severe," interrupted Chloe, sharply. "Isabella is too indulgent; she has spoilt poor Chloe."

"When I said too severe, I only meant, that with such powers of attraction a woman must be more than human not to use them."

"You are wrong. Has Isabella used, or rather misused, her power of attraction? Nothing is impossible with a firm will." Chloe's tone was entirely changed. Her childish manner had left her, and she spoke seriously and earnestly.

"Firmness of will is not wanting in you, Chloe, if you would but exert it," said Isabella.

"You mistake wilfulness for firmness of will. To do what we will, we must have the power of willing," replied Chloe, with the same thoughtful air. Then, suddenly changing her tone, she became the wayward child again. "But I'm tired of moralising, and I dare say you are tired of hearing me. Good-by, good-by." And having kissed her sister, she left the room.

There was a long pause. Isabella was the first to break it.

"Is Chloe as odious as you expected?" she inquired, with a strange sort of timidity.

"Odious!" he exclaimed. "*She* odious!" Then, recollecting himself, "I do not know what to think of her. She is unlike any other mortal."

Isabella now tried to resume the conversation which Chloe's entrance had interrupted. But somehow, she could not speak as she had done before. She blushed to think of the fond expressions she had used, and the manner in which she had betrayed her attachment. It now seemed to her as if she had transgressed the rules of maidenly modesty, in letting him see how well she loved him; she felt shy and reserved. Charles, too, was absent. His eye wandered about the room as if in search of something. Then he asked a few random questions, and seemed quite unconscious that the answers were at cross purposes. After a time, their mutual preoccupation became so painful that they simultaneously rose; and Charles, complaining of fatigue, said that he would retire to his own room.

When Isabella joined Chloe in their joint apartment, she found the latter sitting listlessly in a chair, apparently absorbed in reverie.

She started at Isabella's approach, and, without speaking, placed herself upon a chair at the dressing-table, with her back to her sister.

Isabella, mechanically, began dressing Chloe's hair. Chloe had magnificent hair, and it was Isabella's pleasure to arrange it.

"Why do you take so much trouble with my foolish head?" said Chloe, in a low, dreamy voice.

"Because I like to see my darling look pretty."

Chloe rose impetuously, and embraced her sister.

"Don't be so violent, Chloe. I don't like to see you so violent."

Chloe sat down again, and Isabella went on arranging the long black tresses. Presently she caught a glimpse of Chloe's face in the glass; it struck her that it wore an unnatural expression.

"Is there anything the matter, dear child?" she inquired.

"Matter!" exclaimed Chloe, like one suddenly roused from a dream. "Oh no, there is nothing the matter," she added, more softly. Then, after a moment's pause, she passed her hand across her forehead, and said, abstractedly, "I was only thinking how very odd it is, that as a child, I used not to like Charles Stanly."

"Yes, I remember. You used to be jealous of him."

"I wonder if I shall be jealous now," she proceeded, in the same dreamy tone. "But you will always love me, will you not, Isabella?"

"Foolish little Chloe." And Isabella fondly stroked the soft, round cheek.

"Promise always to love me," persisted Chloe, her tone changing to one of earnest supplication, and as if struggling with some rebellious emotion. "Oh, promise me that."

Isabella's reply was an affectionate caress.

Chloe returned it with a strange vehemence. Then, suddenly disengaging herself from her sister, she turned away, and murmured, as if speaking to herself: "And yet, I don't know why, but I wish he had never come!"

"Chloe!" exclaimed Isabella, reproachfully.

Chloe made no answer, but, hastily finishing her toilette, she hurried down stairs.

That evening Chloe was in extraordinary spirits. She talked and laughed incessantly, but in a wild, incoherent manner. She flew from one subject to another; at one moment vehemently contradicting what she had just before as vehemently asserted. She played and sung in the same fitful, capricious manner. She would strike deep chords on the piano, and begin a plaintive melody, then suddenly break off into a light and lively strain. She would sing snatches of songs, some gay, some sad; but all unfinished. Her conversation, if such random talk could be so called, was addressed solely to her mother or to Isabella. To Charles she never once spoke. It might be that she was offended at his want of attention to herself. In fact, he never seemed to observe her, yet her manner was singular enough to attract the notice of the most indifferent person. Perhaps Charles was disgusted at behaviour, which he probably ascribed to the coquetry, of which he had testified so great a horror. Perhaps he was annoyed at being thus prevented

from speaking confidentially to Isabella. Be this as it may, he was unusually silent, and listened with apparent interest to Madame Rodostomus's discourse. But though the good lady had the conversation to herself almost all the evening, she had not nearly time enough to relate half the remarkable things which had, or had not, happened; which were, or were not, going to happen to herself.

CHAPTER III.

CHLOE was an early riser. Allowed from infancy to follow her whims and caprices, she had been accustomed as a child to go out before daybreak, and wander for hours in the environs of Rome. She was known to all the peasants in the neighbourhood. The little *straniera* was an especial favourite with them. She would sit for hours in their huts, and amuse them by her clever prattle and childish fun. They would often drive her in those graceful cars, drawn by the beautiful white oxen peculiar to that country, and take her to the spots from whence the prospect was finest; then they would place themselves in picturesque groups, while she sketched them in the foreground of her landscapes.

There was something in the dreamy Cam-

pagna peculiarly congenial to her spirit. Her fantastic imagination peopled it with imaginary beings, who held mystic communion with her. Her adventurous disposition delighted in exploring the untrodden waste of the prairie, or in threading the subterranean mazes of the catacombs. These solitary expeditions gratified the wild daring of her character, and increased her innate tendency to the supernatural.

When Isabella first came to live with her mother at Rome, she endeavoured to check that vagrant disposition in her sister. Herself not strong enough to accompany her in those long rambles, she thought it unbecoming and unsafe for so young a child to roam about unheeded and unattended. But her endeavours were vain. Chloe, unused to control, set her sister's remonstrances at nought, and Isabella was forced to yield, and let the wilful little being have her way.

Years brought no change to this roving disposition. The older Chloe grew, the more she hated to be within doors. If the weather prevented her excursions in the Campagna, she would spend her days in the Vatican. Thus

her education was made. Any regular study seemed impossible to Chloe; she could learn nothing in the usual way. Books profited her little; but as she grew fonder of her sister, she would listen with pleasure to her conversation, and from it she derived much instruction and improvement.

The comparatively sedentary life she had been obliged to lead in London, made her return with fresh zest to her solitary rambles. As soon as she arrived at Overdale, she began scouring the country in every direction. She had appropriated to herself a little pony, on which she would take long rides on the hills or among the woods, and often not return until dark.

If Lord Overdale attempted any remonstrances against conduct so strange, Chloe would laugh and jest, and play off such pretty tricks, that it was impossible to withstand the fascination of a manner half childish, half coquetish, but all graceful and feminine. Moreover, Chloe was always ready to walk or ride with him whenever he chose to go abroad. She would dance and frolic round him; then, giving her pony its head, she seemed to skim

the air in his wild speed; but when he thought her far off, and fancied that she had escaped from him, he would suddenly hear her voice carolling behind him, or be startled by her light merry laugh ringing close to his ear. Could any man, especially a man in love, find fault with a creature such as this? Nature and art, impulse and calculation, *espièglerie* and insight, were in her blended and combined in a manner absolutely irresistible. Every folly made her more attractive; each offence more endearing.

In consequence probably of Lord Overdale's absence, Chloe, next morning, stayed out later than usual. Isabella and Madame Rodostomus had already finished their breakfast when she came in. A bright colour was on her cheek, and her eye flashed vividly as she praised the beauty of the weather, and told how extremely she had enjoyed her walk. A few moments afterwards, Charles joined the party.

Madame Rodostomus began to jest, in what she conceived a very facetious manner, upon his late rising. He must mend his ways, she said, when his uncle should return. Lord

Overdale loved punctuality, and had no patience for laziness.

"Mr. Stanly is not lazy," said Chloe, abruptly; "he has been walking over the hills with me. He was out even before I was."

"What has caused this sudden change in your habits?" said Isabella, with unusual eagerness of manner.

Charles reddened to the temples, and launched forth into a long dissertation upon the evils of late rising. He then went on to relate at full length, how, when, and why, he had acquired the custom of getting up early; but his sentences were so involved, and his manner so flurried, that it was difficult to make out his meaning. While he was trying to explain that it was a long, a very long time ago since he had adopted the practice, Chloe suddenly, and as if purposely, interrupted him, and said to a servant who just then came in,

"Is Lord Overdale expected to-day, and when?"

The servant did not know. My lord never told his plans. My lord went at a moment's warning, and returned as unexpectedly. His

lordship's orders were that his household should always be in readiness to receive him.

Charles was in a fever of anxiety. He was about to meet the man whose image had all his life hung over him as a sort of destiny—a relentless fate, on whom depended his future happiness. He had conjured up to himself a fearful picture of this dreaded uncle. It haunted his waking and sleeping dreams. It had allowed him little rest that night. He had been harassed by strange phantasies, wild and incoherent visions. The pictured image of his uncle blended itself unaccountably with Chloe's lovely form. He fancied her standing before him in her gipsey costume, and holding his hand in hers. But when he looked under the broad straw hat, instead of the young fair face which he expected to find there, a pair of piercing eyes glared fiercely from beneath it, and a large brawny hand held in its uplifted fingers the ring which Isabella had given him, and which Chloe had so cunningly abstracted.

It was probably on account of this feverish unrest that Charles had gone out so unusually

early. For, notwithstanding his anxiety to exculpate himself from the charge of laziness, it must be confessed that early rising was not his fort; but it was no wonder that the impending introduction should drive slumber from his pillow.

After breakfast he had a long and confidential talk with Isabella. He related much of his past life, and spoke confidently with respect to the future, but ever and anon his dread of his uncle would return upon him, and he assailed her with questions about him. She evaded them, as before, and told Charles that he must judge for himself both with regard to Lord Overdale's character, and with regard to the line of conduct he should adopt in order to meet with his approval.

Charles was not a little provoked at her unsatisfactory answers, and seeing that she either could not or would not be more explicit, he went in search of Chloe. *She* would take pleasure in assisting him, he thought within himself.

But Chloe was nowhere to be found. He searched for her in vain at home and abroad. At last, after a long and fruitless walk, he

returned, tired and disappointed, to the room where he had left Isabella.

She asked if he had seen her sister, and upon his replying in the negative, Isabella observed that Chloe had not, as usual, come to her morning tasks. "These are never long," she added. "Chloe's patience will not stand continuous application to any one thing; but, to please Lord Overdale, she always, after breakfast, comes to me for a short time, and we read a little together; he generally looks in, in the course of the morning, to inspect our progress."

Charles made no direct answer. He did not tell Isabella that he had been looking for Chloe, but after a while, as if in reply to his own thoughts, he said abstractedly, "I have not seen her since breakfast," and was about to leave the room, when Madame Rodostomus rushed into it.

"He's coming, he's coming! I heard carriage-wheels, and I know they're his. The wheels of his carriage roll quite differently from all other wheels; there is a might and a majesty about them for which I never could account, but he certainly is the most extraordinary man that ever——"

Here the widow's encomiums were cut short by the appearance of the object of them.

He paused for a moment upon the threshold, while his eye riveted itself on his nephew.

Few could bear that piercing glance unmoved. Much as Charles had heard of the power of his uncle's eye, he was quite unprepared for the deep searching look, that seemed at once to read him through and through. His heart sank within him, and the blood rushed to his temples.

But his confusion was only momentary; he summoned his self-command, and went forward to meet his uncle with an air of pleasure.

Lord Overdale's salutation was haughty and cold, even to an unwonted degree. But, for once, this stately demeanour was assumed, and assumed with difficulty. He felt it necessary to appear cold, in order to hide the conflicting feelings that were struggling in his breast. The sight of his nephew aroused within him emotions which had lain dormant for a long half century. Charles was exceed-

ingly like his mother. For a moment, the image of the woman, whom alone he had loved on earth, rose present to the old man's mind in all its former freshness, and that love, deep, devoted, passionate, seemed again to fire and fill his whole ardent soul. He saw before him *her* child, and he seized the extended hand and grasped it warmly. But in another instant all was changed. Her child was also the child of the man who had wronged him so foully—wronged him through her; and the hate which had succeeded to that love, the hate which had swayed his heart, and hardened there full fifty years, returned more deadly than before. His face, which had flushed with strong emotion, turned pale as ashes; the lines, which had relaxed, became rigid as iron; and it was with a harsh grating voice that he replied to Charles's salutation—"I invited you, and therefore bid you welcome."

Charles, who had observed the favourable impression which his first address had produced, and who, indeed, was accustomed to impress favourably, fell back abashed at this

unexpected repulse. He stood amazed, bewildered, and incapable of speaking.

A brief pause ensued. It seemed an eternity to all present. Again Charles started at the metallic vibrations of his uncle's voice, as he said, looking imperiously round, "Wherefore this strange silence? Is aught amiss?"

Even Madame Rodostomus could find no words. Even her loquacity was silenced by this command to speak. But Isabella, sympathising with Charles's confusion, and anxious to relieve it, was about to make some observation, though she hardly knew upon what subject, when Chloe, who had entered the room unperceived, darted forwards, and playfully seizing Lord Overdale's hand, put into it a beautiful and fragrant moss rose. The blush of the flower was far less lovely than that which tinged her cheek as she, throwing her small head gracefully back, looked up in his face, with an expression so soft, so beseeching, as at once to dispel all his angry feelings.

He stooped forwards, as was his wont, in order to allow her with more ease to fix the rose in his button-hole. His haughty frown

had given place to an expression of tenderness, of which, but a moment before, those stern features seemed incapable. "My fair Flora!" he said, as he watched her movements.

Yet, in his open and ardent admiration, there was nothing weak or maudlin, nothing of the senile dotard. On the contrary, his fondness was so dignified, every look and feature was so noble and so manly, that the disparity of their ages was forgotten. The idea of ridicule was the last which could have crossed the mind of the most satirical or fastidious observer.

"How was my bright fairy occupied during my absence?" he inquired, in a low voice.

"Come to the boudoir; come and see," she replied, and darted out of the room.

Lord Overdale followed. Isabella asked Charles if he would also come; he stepped eagerly forwards, and then stopped, hesitating.

When Isabella reached the little sitting-room, she found Lord Overdale looking intently at a landscape. It was a view of Greece, but Chloe had yielded entirely to imagination; and the drawing and colouring were directly in opposition to all received rules. Yet its

very extravagance betrayed genius so extraordinary, that Lord Overdale could not repress his admiration.

"Then you like it?" said Chloe, archly.

"Why, yes; but——"

"Oh, no *buts*. If it does not please you, say so."

She took the paper—half playfully, half impatiently—out of Lord Overdale's hands, and, seizing a pencil, scratched a few hasty strokes upon the foreground. "Perhaps it will please you better now?" she said, laughing.

Right in the middle of the landscape, and quite out of proportion with it, appeared a Scotch terrier and an old tabby cat, the one ludicrously like Lord Overdale, and the other an outrageous caricature of her mother. It was impossible not to recognise both at the very first glance.

Lord Overdale raised his eyebrows, and would have remonstrated, but it was hardly in his power to be dissatisfied with anything that Chloe said or did. She watched the expression of his countenance to see how far she might go; and forestalling a remark, which

she guessed might not be quite approbatory, she sunk upon her knees, in the attitude of Canova's Magdalene, repeating the words, "*Mea culpa, mea culpa.*" Her comb had fallen out of her hair, and the luxuriant tresses rolled in dark waves down to her heels; now straight by their own weight, then curling themselves into the most beautiful ringlets imaginable.

At that moment Charles entered the room. An involuntary exclamation escaped him.

Chloe rose from her knees, and, rapidly twisting back her hair, sat down before a table and placed one elbow on it. She was transformed into Domenichine's Sybil, as beautiful and more inspired. In another moment she was again upon the floor, but in an attitude very different to the preceding one. That expressed contrition, this joyfulness; that breathed heavenly, this earthly love. Again she rose slowly, and stood as Venus emerging from the waves. The illusion was so complete, that the briny drops seemed actually to fly off from the ends of her hair, as she twisted it round and round, as if to wring the water from it.

She threw herself upon a sofa, and sunk back, exhausted, among the cushions.

After some moments' silence, Lord Overdale said, gravely:

"Why did you never let me see you do any of these things before?"

Chloe looked up, surprised at the question. "Because they did not occur to me," she replied gently.

At times, but very rarely, there was in Chloe's voice a tremulous pathos, betraying some inward and involuntary emotion. Such was the case now. As she spoke these last words, the brilliant lustre of her eyes was dimmed for an instant, and they shone black as night through their silken lashes. An unaccountable dread took possession of Isabella as she marked these symptoms. She was at a loss to explain them, but she knew that it was no trifle which could move her sister thus.

She sat down beside her, and whispered kindly in her ear, "My own Chloe, what ails you?"

"Ails me!" exclaimed Chloe, in the clear

and almost piercing voice which was habitual to her. "What should ail me?"

She moved impatiently away from her sister; then, as if recollecting herself, she said, carelessly, "Does nobody ride to-day?"

"Oh, let us ride by all means," exclaimed Charles; "at least, if my uncle does not object," he added, deferentially.

"Your uncle is now your host," replied the peer, in his haughtiest manner, "and as such, cannot object to whatever wish or whim you (his guest) may conceive. Will you ride, ladies?" he added, turning to the sisters.

"I will, for one," said Chloe, with childish delight.

"How long it is since I have ridden with you, Charles!" said Isabella, rising, and approaching him. "Do you remember our last ride at Eastrow?"

Charles made some answer, but in so low a tone that it did not reach Chloe's ears, though she leant eagerly forwards to catch the words.

She started when she heard Isabella call her by her name from the further end of the

room; then again leant back listlessly upon the cushion.

"Come, Chloe," said Isabella, as she went —"come and get ready for riding. You are seldom dilatory when riding is concerned."

"I don't want to ride," replied Chloe, without moving; "I shan't ride to-day."

"You are changeable," said Lord Overdale. "You were eager to ride but a moment ago."

"A moment ago is not now. The fact is," she added, as if seeking an evasion, "I don't like any of your horses. They have none of them any spirit."

"Then walk with me. Your sister is provided with an escort, whom she, no doubt, prefers to any other."

By way of reply, Chloe darted out of the room, and in a short time returned, equipped for riding.

"Another change!" said Lord Overdale, almost sternly. "Did I not say that I wished you to walk with me?"

"Yes, I heard you say so, but I don't wish to walk. Ride with me, if you please, or stay at home, if you like it better," she added, petulantly, and flew down stairs. Without

speaking, Lord Overdale slowly followed, and mounted his horse, to the annoyance of all parties, who felt his presence would be a restraint.

The exhilirating exercise of riding, or some other cause, put Chloe into extravagant spirits. She laughed, and sung like a wild creature. She made her horse take flying leaps, urged him to his utmost speed, and seemed bent upon courting danger. It was as if, oppressed by an exuberance of life and spirits, she sought some extraordinary vent for them. Lord Overdale was even graver than usual. He said no word, either of approbation, or disapprobation of Chloe's mad feats; but his increased solemnity, instead of damping her spirits, seemed to give them an additional rebound.

Charles rode beside Isabella. He did not seem to notice Chloe's strange mode of riding. Once only, when he saw her about to take a leap, which was extremely dangerous, he involuntarily urged his horse forwards; but when he saw Chloe safe on the other side of the ditch, checked him immediately, and returned to Isabella without making any ob-

servation. The conversation flagged. Charles's manner was constrained and absent. Isabella could not help comparing it with what it formerly was. She remembered their last ride together, his anxious bending over her saddle-bow, that he might catch every tone of her voice; his fear lest she should be fatigued; his apprehension of danger for her, even when none existed; his eagerly seizing every opportunity to guide her rein, that he might have a pretext for touching her hand; these and a thousand other trivial circumstances occurred to her mind, and acquired a deeper force and meaning when contrasted with his behaviour now. It was with difficulty that she maintained her composure, and it cost her a terrible effort to keep up a desultory conversation. They talked chiefly, if not entirely, about the different characteristics of the Overdale domain; their most interesting discussion related to the porch of a new lodge then in progress; and though Chloe was always doing something extraordinary before their eyes, her name never passed their lips during the whole of their ride.

The silence at dinner was appalling. Even

Madame Rodostomus was awe-struck by the sinister expression which hung upon Lord Overdale's massy brow. Excepting the necessary dialogue relative to the dishes, not a word was uttered during the whole of the first course. The poor old lady was all but choked.

At last, and after her third glass of wine, she could stand it no longer. Lord Overdale's solemnity had frightened away all her ideas; she could think of nothing in the world to say, but speak she must; so, for want of a better subject of conversation, she turned suddenly upon Chloe, and chirped out in very cracked tones, "How do you do, my dear?"

Chloe burst out laughing.

The ice once broken, Madame Rodostomus was determined not to let the conversation flag again; but still frightened to death by Lord Overdale's stern face just opposite to her, she was obliged to look round the room in search of subjects to talk about. Unfortunately for Charles, her eyes happened to light upon him.

"Bless me! how silent you've grown. I declare you've not spoken one word the whole of dinner-time. You talked fast enough four

years ago. What on earth has come over you?"

Charles's evident discomfiture did not abash the persevering widow; she gained courage on hearing the sound of her own voice. "I'm sure I can't think why people won't talk to-day. We never were so silent before; it may be absurd, but I really can't help it, I like to talk, which is very natural, for I always have so much to say. Poor dear Romayne never could account for it; he was rather silent, and Isabella's his own daughter there; but as for poor dear Rodostomus—Lord! how he used to talk! and Chloe takes after him. By-the-by, when Isabella is in one of her grave moods, I wonder why you don't try Chloe. It is a very remarkable thing now that you don't speak to her. You used not to be afraid of Isabella; she's not jealous, and I don't think you have so much as looked at Chloe since you came into the house, which, considering her beauty, does, I must say, quite pass my comprehension. Now just see the colour she's getting. She's worth looking at, I can tell you, though you don't seem to think so; indeed, I——"

"I am tired of sitting still so long," said Chloe, suddenly rising. "Let us go to the drawing-room."

Chloe's diversion was not successful. When the widow once got an idea into her head, no human power could drive it out again. The marvellous fact of Charles's not admiring Chloe had struck her for the first time, and struck her so forcibly, that it stuck by her the whole evening. She harped upon it very perseveringly and very teazingly. She wanted Chloe to recite, or sing, or dance, or do something, to show Charles "that she *could* do something;" but Chloe was inexorable. She had thrown herself upon the sofa on entering the drawing-room, and nothing would induce her to move from it.

Finding that she could make no impression upon Chloe, Madame Rodostomus next made an attack upon Charles. "Why don't *you* ask her; perhaps she would sing if *you* asked her——"

But the widow was interrupted by a loud chord which Isabella struck upon the piano.

To drown her mother's words, was, as she knew, the only mode of stopping them, so

having played a few modulations, she asked Charles if he remembered any of the old songs they used to practice together at Eastrow.

He replied in the affirmative, happy of any excuse to silence the old lady.

Isabella began a simple air, which used to be his favourite. "How well I recollect the first time you sang it!" she said.

"So do I," replied Charles.

"And I," tremulously echoed Chloe.

"Twice in one day, that strange, soft voice!" thought Isabella to herself. "What can it mean?"

This idea perplexed her to such a degree, that she forgot her accompaniment. Her hands lay inactive upon the keys, and she fell into a fit of musing.

"Why don't you go on, Isabella," said Charles, impatiently; "I was just going to begin singing, and you put me out."

"I beg your pardon," she said, rousing herself, and recommenced the accompaniment. But she could not follow Charles, as formerly. They did not keep together. Each tried to

yield to the other, and, consequently, both failed.

At last, after various unsuccessful attempts, Charles said, "It will never do. We had better give it up—I shall never get right again now."

"Shan't you!" exclaimed Chloe, imperiously. She rushed to the piano. "We shall see. Isabella yields to you. You require to be dominated."

Chloe took her sister's seat at the instrument, and played the symphony, with marked emphasis.

As if under the dominion of some superior power, Charles sung as he had never sung before. There was an irresistible *entrain* in Chloe's accompaniment. He was proceeding triumphantly, when she suddenly stopped, and looked at her sister, who was standing beside her.

"What made you sigh, Isabella?" she whispered in her ear, as she took her hand, and pressed it tenderly. "I heard you sigh—and your look says—— What does your look say?" she repeated, as if to herself, and gazing

earnestly into Isabella's face. "No, Mr. Stanly, I will play no more," she added, turning to Charles, who had entreated her to continue the accompaniment.

She left the room, and did not again return that evening.

CHAPTER IV.

PERHAPS never, in his whole life, had Lord Overdale's strong mind been convulsed by so many painful and contradictory feelings. Had it been possible for him to regret or repent of a step he had once taken, deeply would he have rued the day when he invited Charles Stanly to Overdale. His fixed principle through life had always been, that "What 'tis weak to do, 'tis weaker to repent, once being done." He knew that regret is generally the synonyme for vacillation, that true repentance does not look back, but forward. It resolves; and errs no more. He knew that man cannot control outward circumstances; but that he may, in most instances, improve, and turn them to account. If he cannot com-

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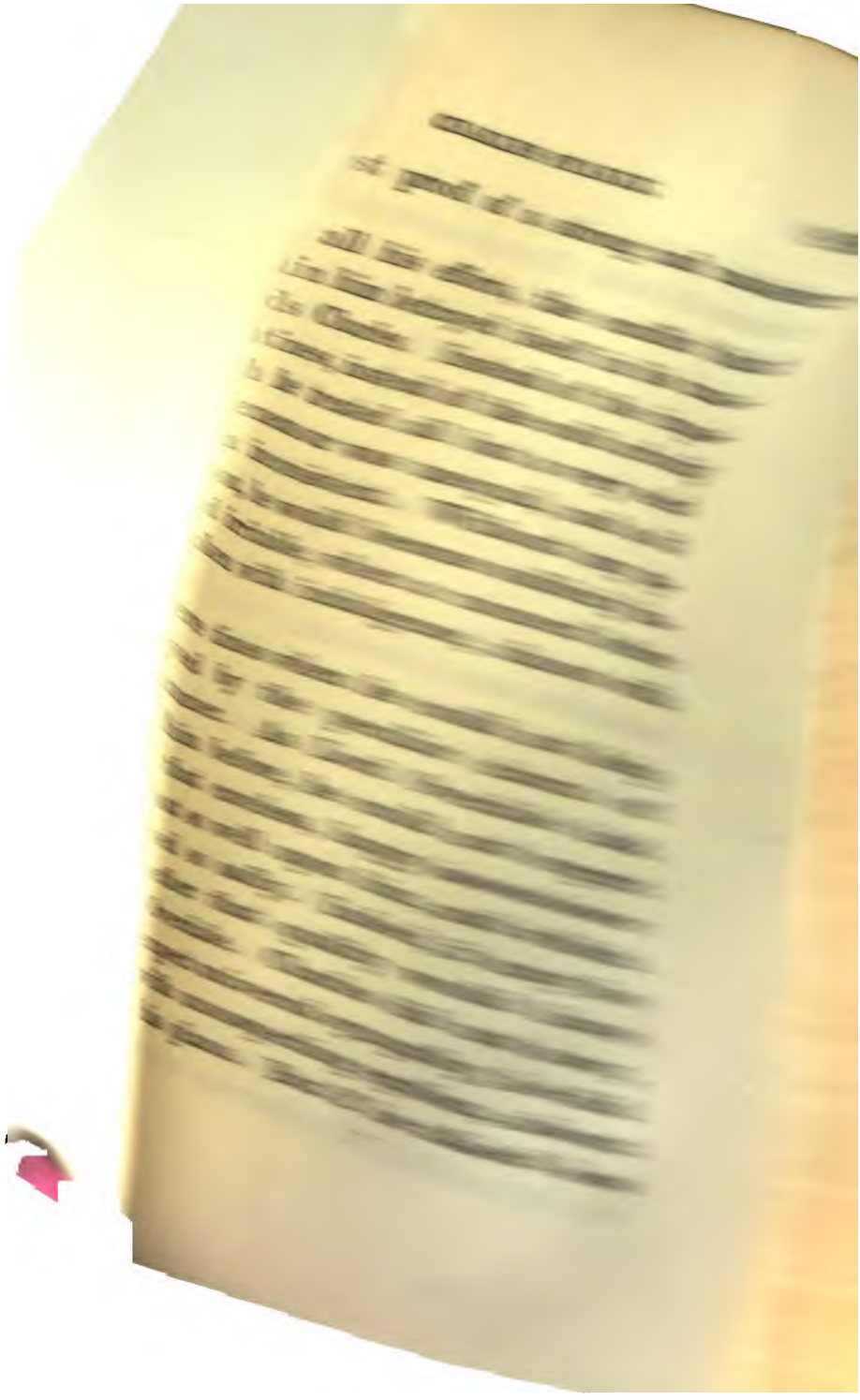


mand destiny, he may always modify, and often direct it.

The invitation to Charles was his own act and deed. Nor had he done it thoughtlessly. He had weighed the probable consequences, and accepted the responsibility they entailed. He had foreseen the result, but not its extent. He had never doubted but that the sight of his nephew would awaken painful emotions in his breast; he was prepared for them; but their intensity far exceeded his expectations. There are cases in which imagination outweighs reality.

Yet had it been to do again, he would have acted in the same manner. He knew that Chloe was only to be won by kindness towards her sister. To gain Chloe's affection was the one object for which he now lived. This might be a weakness; but he acknowledged it freely. He was under no delusion; he did not seek, even for an instant, to deceive himself. If he was weak, it was because he chose to be so. In his very weakness, there was an energy, which redeemed it. To be aware of a weakness, and yet to dare it, is perhaps

the greatest proof of a strong and master mind.

Despite all his efforts, the conflict that raged within him betrayed itself in his manner towards Charles. Instead of the impassive haughtiness, instead of the cold urbanity with which he treated all but a very select few, his demeanour was unequal, and as it would seem inconsistent. Without any apparent reason, he would become suddenly imperious and irritable, when a moment before he had spoken with indulgence, almost with kindness.

There were times when he could not help being swayed by the peculiar charm of Charles's manner. As Lord Overdale had not known him before, he could not regret the loss of that careless, happy *insouciance* which once sat so well upon him, and which Isabella missed so sadly. Indeed, it may be doubted, whether that quality would have suited Lord Overdale. Charles did not now, as formerly, expect universal sympathy; he did not run on, with unsuspecting egotism, about himself and his plans. But if he talked less

of his own concerns, it was because he thought more of them. He was reserved from knowledge of the world, not from modesty.

His conversations with Lord Overdale were always on general, chiefly on political subjects. He spoke with vivacity and judgment, and showed much acquaintance with public affairs which were at that moment very complicated. He related, with spirit, many anecdote illustrative of the state of parties, and of the motives by which each was actuated. Lord Overdale would often listen to these narratives with attention and pleasure.

But if, unfortunately, Charles gave a look which recalled his mother, or used an expression habitual to his father, all the old leaven would be stirred up within Lord Overdale's breast; and at the moment when Charles expected an approving look, or an encouraging word, Lord Overdale would set him down with a frown of contempt, or utter some pointed and galling sarcasm, which was the more difficult to bear from being utterly unexpected and uncalled for.

One day, about a fortnight after his arrival at Overdale, Charles was summoned by his

uncle into his study. Lord Overdale had just returned from an early walk with Chloe, and appeared in unwonted good humour. He began questioning Charles respecting his future projects, and told him that it was his intention, upon his marriage with Isabella, to make a handsome settlement upon them.

Charles's gratitude was open and sincere. He said what he, at the moment, really felt; he assured his uncle that he valued money more for her sake than for his own. He then went on to praise Isabella's character with such genuine warmth, that Lord Overdale was touched, and expressed his satisfaction with heartiness. But, unfortunately, Charles, elated by his uncle's approbation, let his spirits run away with him. He rattled on with a reckless confidence, which recalled his father, while, at the same time, a certain triumphant, yet graceful levity of tone, reminded Lord Overdale of his too attractive, but false, frail mother.

He let Charles finish what he had to say, and then rose suddenly from his seat. He could no longer restrain the fierce strife

which raged in his breast. There was something in Lord Overdale's look which made poor Charles's heart sink within him. His face expressed the fear which he could not control. Lord Overdale, like most people who inspire awe, had a sovereign contempt for those who feel it. He remembered how both his brother, and the woman whom his brother married, had occasionally betrayed fear of him. He remembered days long gone by. The dead seemed revived. Who shall say what he remembered? That dreadful portion of his existence, on which he had rarely dared to think, rose fresh before him, not in detached scenes, but all crowded into one dreadful moment—that when he had found *her* false. He turned very pale, made a gesture which Charles was at a loss to interpret, and said, with strange fierceness, "Leave me. Do you not see I would be alone?"

Poor Charles did not know what to make of such unaccountable behaviour. He went for consolation to the little sitting-room; where, as he expected, he found Isabella. But she could give him no clue with respect to Lord Overdale's mysterious conduct. It

grieved her excessively; yet, as she observed, there was no use in speculating and wondering what might be its cause; Lord Overdale would probably himself explain it, sooner or later. Meanwhile, it was best not to increase the unpleasantness of the situation by unnecessarily dwelling upon it. Time only could bring a remedy.

This was all true, but it did not satisfy Charles. He loved wondering and speculating. Lady Ramsay had humoured him in this most profitless mode of spending time. So, finding that Isabella was too reasonable to do what must add to his discomfort, he left her, and went in search of Chloe.

He had not seen the latter all day. The moment when he had beheld her at breakfast, bringing her rose to Lord Overdale, went for nothing; and he longed to tell her what had taken place between himself and his uncle; he longed to hear her words of interest and of sympathy. She would feel for him, and feel with him. His anxiety to see her was increased by the few opportunities he had lately had of doing so. Lord Overdale frequently joined them in their early walks; and that

morning he and Chloe had gone out sooner than usual, and before Charles was ready.

But he was at a loss where to find her. Somehow, he did not like to put the question to Isabella; so he wandered about the rooms, looking for Chloe; and then went into the garden, but in vain.

He returned to the house, and, with the courage of despair, asked one of the servants if he knew where Miss Rodostomus was likely to be. Very probably in the picture-gallery, was the reply. Miss Rodostomus often spent her afternoons there. To the picture-gallery, accordingly, Charles bent his steps, according to the servant's direction.

It was in an uninhabited wing of the house; Charles had not before thought of visiting it. He had some difficulty in finding his way, and once or twice lost himself in a mazy labyrinth of rooms. At last he caught distant sounds of a deep touching contralto voice. It could be none but Chloe's. He hurried forwards, and in another moment he stood before her.

A book was in her hand, but she was not reading; paper and pencils lay beside her,

but she had drawn no stroke. She was reclining upon one of the hard old sofas, apparently lost in reverie.

She did not start when Charles approached, but rose, as if she had expected to see him; then sitting down again, she motioned him to sit by her. The window was open. The sunlight streamed in upon them bright and gloriously.

Charles obeyed, but silently. He had forgotten what he was just now so anxious to tell her. He had forgotten his annoyance, and its cause. He had forgotten his uncle. He had forgotten all but her.

Chloe began talking, as if in continuance of a discourse in which she had been for a moment interrupted. She went on speaking to Charles, as if he had been holding a long conversation with her. It would seem that her dream had been of him, and that she had fancied him near her, and communing with her.

It was a strange conversation. Charles spoke little, scarcely at all, but she answered his inmost and unuttered thoughts. She felt what he would have said, and replied to the

words which he had not spoken. She talked of nature, and of its beauty. She spoke the language of the flowers which dotted the grass on which they looked from the window where they sat; she interpreted the song of the birds, as they scudded before the breeze. Then she directed his attention to the quaint old portraits which hung along the walls. She knew all the gloomy and terrific legends attached to them. Chloe's mode of narrating these wild tales heightened the awful mystery which hung on them. When memory failed, imagination supplied its place, and lent a double charm.

Charles could have listened to her for ever. He felt as if transported into fairy-land, so strange were the images her words called forth. It was as if he was translated into a new world, and surrounded by another race of beings. No Arabian fictions were ever half so fanciful, or half so astonishing as Chloe's narratives. Whatever subject she touched, seemed turned into poetry. Her grouping was artistic, her language picturesque and graphic.

"I must go now," she said, at length. "I

see the sun sinking behind the hill. He tells me that it is time to leave you."

Charles sought not to detain her. He was entranced by her words, rapt in admiration of her beauty. After she had left him, he remained, for some time, immovable, and lost in thought. Then he roused himself with an effort, and retired to his room.

That evening Chloe was silent and thoughtful. It was not till late that she went towards the piano, opened it, and let her fingers run at random along the keys. Then, as if she could not find the melody she sought, she ceased playing, and sat with upturned eyes, as if in search of some fleeting recollection.

After a while she looked up, and perceived Charles gazing intently at her. When he found that she observed him, he started; then recovering himself, he begged her to go on with her music.

Her eyes remained fixed on him with a pensive and strained expression; then she said, dreamily, "I cannot—cannot recollect it."

"Recollect what?" said Charles, in his low, soft voice.

That tone seemed to revive her memory.

A light flashed in her eye, and her hands falling upon the keys, struck a loud, thrilling chord.

"What—what is that?" exclaimed Charles, amazed. "I have surely heard those notes before?"

Chloe proceeded with the accompaniment. It was a German student's air, at once stirring and impassioned.

"I had forgotten it," said Charles, in the same tone of surprise. "I have not heard it for years. It recals my student-days at Heidelberg. When—when did you learn it?"

"No matter when I learnt it. Do you sing it."

Charles sung the German words. Chloe's full, deep voice made the chorus, but in Italian. The whole went off with great spirit. The audience applauded. Even Lord Overdale seemed pleased.

"You can sing well enough if you choose," said Chloe.

"If *I* choose!" He spoke in his soft whisper.

The colour rose in her cheeks, and, as if to drown her embarrassment, she run rapidly over the keys. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike her. She played some chords, then

stopped, then repeated them again. But it was some time before she could find the modulation she wanted. Again she cast her eyes upwards in the endeavour to seize the idea which continually escaped her. Charles watched her as her colour went and came, and her expression changed every moment.

"I have it! I have it!" at length she exclaimed, like one inspired, and went off into a beautiful improvisation.

The strain she played was at first light, and lively, and full of brilliant passages, but gradually it assumed a graver character, varied in modulation, but of extreme tenderness. Then the style became more intricate; difficulties, executed with wonderful rapidity, succeeded each other, until she came to a passage which seemed to baffle her skill. She began it over and over again, and in every imaginable way, but instead of the resolutions which the ear anticipated, she terminated by a harsh and thrilling dissonance.

Her fingers had lost the art of creating harmony. Although now and then she struck some chords of wonderful power and passion,

the melody she sought always escaped her. Vainly she endeavoured to seize and express it. It floated near, but above, or beyond her, and vanished just as she thought to arrest it. At last, a grating discord made her rise impatiently from the piano.

She found herself close to Charles Stanly. She had forgotten that he was near her. There was something in his eye, as it met hers, which overpowered her, and she sunk upon a chair.

She recovered herself, however, in a moment, and looking up, said, with ill-assumed indifference:

"I am provoked at my ill success. I never before failed in expressing a character in music."

"Whose character did you seek to express?"

"Whose character!" she exclaimed, surprised that there could be any doubt upon the subject. "*Yours*," she added, very softly.

"I should have thought mine easy enough to read."

"Oh, no. It is the most difficult I ever attempted. It has a phase which I cannot resolve; a grating chord which I cannot har-

monise. Somehow, I do not like it. It bodes no good."

She seemed to be thinking aloud, unconscious that he heard her. Then, without again looking at Charles, who stood watching all her movements, she rose, and went to the sofa upon which Isabella was sitting. "Make room for me, dear sister," she said. Isabella complied, and they sat for the rest of the evening together, but without speaking.

Chloe had little sleep that night. She was haunted by a dim foreboding of the musical passage by which she wanted to express the inarticulate emotions of her heart. Music was her natural language. As a child, when excited by feelings which she could not translate into words, she was wont to fly to the piano, and there throw off the oppression which harassed her. After a long improvisation, she would rise, soothed. "*Mi sono sfogata,*" she would say, and resume her childish occupations. This evening, for the first time, her usual resource failed her; she had been unable to seize the interpretation she required. Several times during the night she

started up, dreaming that she had found it; but it always escaped her, and she tossed about, feverish and restless.

She rose even earlier than usual, dressed hastily, and went out.

It was a glorious morning. Summer was just fading into autumn, the warm breeze was tempered into elastic freshness, and a light haze which hung about the hills lent the prospect that mysterious vagueness of outline, so beautiful and so soft. The earth was frosted with dewdrops, a few pale stars dotted the sky, the hills were still robed in night, but their crests glowed with festive diadems, for the sun had just risen behind them, and a long pale ray pierced the woods here and there, like sorrow wearing a sad, prophetic smile.

It might be that some gloomy forebodings rose vaguely in Chloe's mind, for a soft dreamy shadow was on her countenance, and her step, always elastic, was slower and more undulating than usual. She did not dance and skip with her sportive rapidity of movement; she seemed to float over the earth. Her little feet hardly disturbed the dewdrops which

hung upon the long grass. She passed over it, light as the breeze which bore her forwards.

She went on, forgetful of time, and of distance. A dream was upon her; vision after vision floated mysteriously in her brain. It was as if past and future were blended and harmonised into present. She was at once a child, and a woman. One scene long gone by rose up in her mind, fresh as of yesterday. It seemed strange why that regatta at Eastrow so occupied her thoughts; strange why those feelings should come back to her now as vivid as before—the same, and yet different—how different! On that day, Charles Stanly had saved her life—how wonderful were the emotions called forth by this recollection!

Was it pleasure? was it pain? It was neither, or both; it was a new life, a new soul called forth within her. The objects around seemed quickened into a fresh existence. She gazed at them with wonder; she marvelled at their beauty.

All nature wore a new aspect in her sight. It seemed at once lovlier, and less lovely. It was as a poem, beautiful because suggestive; for beauty and poetry are nothing in them-

selves, everything in the images they create within us.

The birds sang sweetly above her head; but it was not their carol that made music to her soul. The flowers spread their petals before the advancing sun, but it was not their brilliancy which charmed her sight. Whose smile gilt the sunbeam, whose breath perfumed the breeze? One image rose as a central glory. The universe was its background.

After a long ramble, Chloe returned homewards. A deep glow lit up her cheek; her eyes were at once soft and brilliant. As she was about to enter the house she turned back, and went into the flower-garden, to gather her morning's offering for Lord Overdale. On opening the wicket, she smiled with pleasure as she perceived Charles Stanly standing at a little distance.

Her first impulse was to fly towards him; then suddenly turning back, she hastened to the house; but, as if involuntarily, she again stopped, turned back, and walked slowly to the spot where Charles stood watching her.

"*Ben lorato!*" she said, in her pretty

Italian, and in her light, childlike manner. "A lovely morning—oh, so lovely!"

"Yes," he replied, "it is lovely, for you are here!"

A conscious blush overspread her features. To hide her confusion, she stooped down and began gathering some flowers.

Among these was one moss rose of peculiar beauty, and intended, of course, for Lord Overdale. But Charles extended his hand, and with an involuntary movement she put the rose into it. He seized the flower eagerly, and put it to his lips.

This action recalled Chloe to herself. "I did not mean it!" she said, plaintively—"oh, I did not mean it. Give it me—pray give it me again!"

"Ask my life, and you shall have it; but this rose!—no, I cannot, will not part with it."

"Oh, Charles!" faltered Chloe. She would have said more, but the intonations of her voice terrified herself. She had lost all control over it. She paused in hesitation for a moment, then she turned away, and walked towards the house.

"Oh stay," said Charles, "but one instant! I ask but one instant!"

Chloe turned half round, held up her clasped hands in a supplicating attitude, and hastened her pace towards the house.

"One word, one little word!" She stopped, listening.

"Tell me but this—that song you played last night. When, where did you hear it?"

She turned full round, and looked at him in surprise. "Have you forgotten? Can you forget that day at Eastrow?—the regatta—when you risked your life for me?"

A sudden light beamed in Charles's eyes. The blood rushed violently to his temples.

"Four years ago!" she proceeded, as if speaking to herself—"four whole years! Wonderful! it seems as yesterday!"

"Chloe! there is from above a power that works all miracles. Have you not heard its name? Do you not know its might?"

A moan, like a stifled cry for help, escaped her. She tottered back a few steps and fell upon her knees. "Forgive me, oh God forgive me!" she murmured, and covered her face with her hands.

He advanced to raise her up. She shrunk back from his touch; but as she looked towards him, the rapturous joy which shone in his eyes thrilled through her frame. A feeling of unspeakable beatitude rushed in upon her, like a tumultuous flood. It overwhelmed her. She was as in a trance. The world and all in it seemed annihilated, all but herself and him.

He gazed silently at her, awed by her extraordinary expression. Again he advanced, and was about to take her hand; but before he could approach her she started from her dream, looked wildly about her, and flew rapidly towards the house.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he prepared to follow, when he heard steps behind him. He looked round, and perceived Isabella.

"Was not Chloe here? I came to call her. Lord Overdale has been inquiring for her."

Instead of replying to her question, Charles began talking in a confused and incoherent manner; then with a sudden eagerness, and without preface, he abruptly urged Isabella to fix a time for their marriage. At that mo-

ment the whole truth flashed upon her. An inarticulate dread, which had of late haunted her, acquired consistency. Her worst fears were realised. Isabella knew that he pressed his suit upon her, because he misdoubted himself, because he loved her sister.

The thought filled her with horror. She shrunk back from him with a sort of loathing. Then pity stole into her heart; she lamented the weakness of an amiable nature—the fatal weakness that will commit a crime, rather than correct or confess an error. To argue or reason with such a character was very difficult to Isabella. Clear-sighted and decided as she was, she knew not how to deal with one so hopelessly the reverse. Fortunately, a servant sent by Lord Overdale to summon them to breakfast, prevented, for the moment, any further conference, and gave her time to mature her thoughts.

They reached the breakfast-room together. Chloe had entered it, as it would seem, a few moments before them. She went up to Lord Overdale with her morning offering, but not with her former wayward playfulness. She

held out her rose in a manner so timid that in another person it would have appeared awkward. Lord Overdale stood erect and unmoved; he did not stoop over her, as of yore; he took the flower with a stately bow, and himself placed it in his button-hole. It was clear that the ceremony was performed that day merely from habit, and that its performance was unpleasant to both parties. Isabella sighed when she recollected the look of dignified fondness with which he formerly hailed Chloe's arrival, and accepted her gift.

From that day he no longer used those terms of endearment, which he loved to choose with so much appropriateness. She was no longer his skylark, or his bright fairy. From that day his manner changed; it became morose and gloomy.

Isabella marked the difference, and knew its cause. Ever since Charles's arrival, she had felt that sort of vague uneasiness which portends a coming storm. She watched it lowering in the distance, and gather round, and draw nearer and nearer. Yet for some time she thought, or tried to think, that she

might be mistaken. At first Charles took care daily to have long conversations with Isabella, and then he sometimes was again his former self. He would laugh and talk with his old good-humoured fun. He had moments of *épanchement*, as at Eastrow four years before. He would speak cheerfully of the past, and dilate confidently upon the future.

But gradually these conversations became less and less frequent; at length their mutual constraint of manner became so painful, that each sought to avoid them. That meeting in the garden was the first time Isabella had seen him alone for several days.

Each hour that passed increased Isabella's dejection. Something was continually occurring to force upon her mind proofs of what she would, even now, have fain doubted. The conflict within her own heart was terrible; yet she was not entirely absorbed by selfish sorrow; she had still feelings and pity for others. But her situation was the more painful, as she could not do anything to relieve either herself or them.

She saw each day confirm the dislike which Lord Overdale had taken to his nephew. That

fitful kindness which he had at first evinced towards him now entirely ceased; he spoke little; what he said was severe and sarcastic. Isabella had never expected the uncle and nephew to suit; but she hoped that Lord Overdale would be just towards Charles; and that Charles would appreciate his uncle's good qualities. But this was not to be. There was more than coldness in Lord Overdale's treatment of Charles; it had become hatred.

Isabella pitied Charles Stanly. Or rather, perhaps, she pitied the weakness which tarnished a character in so many respects amiable; and which she now, more than ever, feared would paralyse, if not annihilate, his good qualities. She knew that weakness often ends in wickedness, that want of moral courage is the worst kind of cowardice, and that cowardice leads a man on step by step from error to crime. That Charles had no moral courage was but too plain.

But if Isabella's pity for Charles was mingled with other and less tender feelings, Chloe engaged all her unmixed sympathies. Isabella forgot her own sufferings when she

thought of those which the poor child was enduring. She knew Chloe's nature, at once excitable and enthusiastic, passionate yet tenacious, impetuous but not enduring. Isabella had watched over her from infancy, and she had learnt to read feelings which even now she could hardly comprehend, so different were they to her own. But Isabella was one of those few people who can sympathise with emotions to which they are themselves strangers.

To others, Chloe's behaviour might seem unaccountably strange; Isabella understood it but too well. She had watched the change steal over her by slow degrees; so gradually, in fact, that it was almost imperceptible. It was only by looking back and comparing what she now was to what she had been, that the difference could be perceived.

From the moment of Charles's arrival a certain alteration was perceptible in her manner. She became more gentle, and more liable to fits of reverie. It was only now and then that she broke out into the impetuosity natural to her, or gave way to the fire of her pointed epigrams. Daily these outbursts became more

and more rare. At first, she seemed to avoid both her sister and Lord Overdale, and to seek solitary walks and rides. Perhaps she secretly rejoiced when Charles shared them with her; but she neither sought nor avoided his company.

Then she became more sedentary. She would sit by Isabella all the morning, busied with her book or her drawing. But she made little progress in either. She had lost her former aptitude for learning. Instead of seizing, as if by inspiration, the best points of a book, and making pertinent or droll remarks upon them, she would now read steadily from beginning to end, without observation or comment. If Isabella questioned her upon what she had been reading, she would look confused, and answer by some common-place, generally foreign to the subject.

Formerly she would spend whole mornings at the piano, and then not open it for a week. She would draw diligently for days together, and then throw aside her pencil, and seem to have forgotten the art. Now she practised music and drawing steadily, and at regular times; but instead of the brilliant passages

she used to substitute for those written, instead of the eccentric flights in which her pencil delighted, she tamely played the notes before her, or copied servilely, and in a cramped, hard manner. Her individuality seemed lost; the stamp of genius was gone.

But from the day when Chloe met Charles in the garden, her character presented still another phase. It was as if she only lived for one purpose—to prove her affection for her sister. This affection did not, as formerly, show itself in spasmodic fits; it was now unvarying, and its delicacy and tenderness incredibly touching. It was expressed by looks rather than by words. It was an incessant consideration for Isabella's wishes; she divined and forestalled them. She rarely left Isabella's side; never without telling whither she was going, and when she should return. She took no more rambles in the woods and on the hills. Her thrilling laugh no longer rang along the corridors. Her voice was now low and soft, her manner quiet, even timid. She was meekly and passively obedient. She was forbearing towards her mother, and gentle with

Lord Overdale; but she spoke little to either, or, indeed, to anybody. She seemed to have forgotten her witty sallies, her captivating art. Her coquetry had left her; not a trace of the old love of admiration remained. She shunned notice; she was retiring and simple. The wayward child had become a feeling woman.

CHAPTER V.

It would be difficult to imagine a situation more distressing than that in which Isabella was placed. She saw the truth; she did not shrink from it. Charles Stanly no longer loved her.

From the first, she had read his character; she had never sought to delude herself with respect to it; she knew its instability, and had always felt that a change was probable; she told herself so, again and again; yet, till that fatal day at Eastrow, her heart refused to believe what her judgment knew.

Those brief moments had been a fearful revelation. Then and there the illusion vanished. What she suffered few can tell, for few possess feelings at once so deep and

so intense. She mastered them with a heroic effort; an increase of outward calm concealed the agony within.

Yet even though she knew, she doubted of the truth. There were moments when she denied her reason. Often would the bright day-dream return upon her, and deceived by the intensity of her emotions she could not believe that it was only vanity.

Insight does not deaden feeling, it heightens it. There are things we anticipate, yet for which we can never be prepared. The disorder may be long and hopeless, still the death of those we love takes us by surprise at last.

Who can tear out an affection which has struck deep root in our heart, which has become part of ourself, and feel no pang? Who can watch the fair vision fade and vanish, and not shudder at the blank it has left behind? It is an awful moment that, which recals the loss of our best affections, the fallacy of our dearest hopes; when we see a waste where all was life and fulness, a sepulchre in place of a sanctuary. Isabella felt that the godlike spark which was kindled in her heart had been fed with earthly fuel; it had flared and

burnt out, and left neither light nor warmth behind.

Charles had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting; he was unworthy of her love; he had betrayed it, and how betrayed it?

A disposition more passionate than Isabella's might have found vent and relief in its own violence. Extravagance evaporates in lamentation; but true feeling is always silent. Isabella's grief was concentrated and calm. It preyed upon her deeply, but silently. The void in her heart seemed fathomless. She pined for sympathy, she pined for affection; she deserved them, for she had capacity for both, and to their fullest extent; yet she was desolate and alone.

Did she regret Charles Stanly? No; for he was unworthy of her; but she regretted her wasted affection, those pure feelings spent upon him, those fond hopes which he had blighted. She mourned not for Charles Stanly, but for Charles Stanly's love. What is the death of a friend to the death of his affection?

But time brought its usual solace. Gradually she became accustomed to the painful

truth, and she began to wonder at her past folly.

Often and often would Frank Tyrrell's words recur to her mind: "Impulses, even the best, are, without fixed principles, worthless." Frank had warned her, and she had spurned the warning, which she knew was true. Could there be greater folly? more wilful madness?

The more she reproached herself, the more she excused Charles. It was not his fault that he acted according to his nature. The blame was hers. She had expected too much of him; she expected a return for what she gave; but if he had little, could he give more? He had loved her with what love he could. His feelings were superficial; no human effort could make them deep.

Charles had followed the ordinary standard; he had shown himself a weak human being. What right had she to expect otherwise? Why look for exceptions to a general rule? She had prepared her fate, and must submit to it.

If she had but listened to Frank Tyrrell; if she had but allowed herself to be guided by him; all this misery would have been spared.

How truly he had spoken, yet how kindly! Why did she wilfully disbelieve him?

In any retrospect of the past, Frank's good and great qualities stood out pre-eminent. All the enjoyment she had tasted in life she owed to him. The thought of him was the one recollection which brought with it no pang. For their single misunderstanding had been so freely, so fully cancelled. It had enhanced his excellence. She forgave herself the injustice which had proved his worth.

He did not follow the ordinary standard. He was an exception to all rules. His attachment had been undeviating and true. In good and in ill fortune, he had held steadily by her. In every trial his noble heart had come out brighter.

What a difference between the two men! Charles's passion was like the meteor which blazes and burns out, the wandering light which lures and strays. Frank's steady affection was as a beacon to cheer and to guide; it was like the bright clear star which unceasingly points to peace and to happiness. And she had preferred the one to the other! Now

that the delusion was over, she could hardly believe that it had ever really existed.

One evening, when the party were sitting together, worn out by ineffectual struggles to keep up a semblance of conversation, the door was thrown open, and Mr. Tyrrell was announced.

Never was arrival more welcome. Everybody felt relieved. It was as if a weight had been removed from them. The present state of things had of late become so intolerable, that it seemed as if any change must be for the better; and no change could be more acceptable than that produced by the appearance of a person who was liked and valued by all.

Lord Overdale received Frank cordially—almost warmly. Isabella met him with sincere pleasure; something of the old fun sparkled in Chloe's eyes as she replied to his greeting. There was a certain awkwardness in Charles's manner when he first perceived his friend; but this might be nothing more than surprise at his unexpected arrival.

If Madame Rodostomus did not feel more joy than the rest of the party, at all events

she had a great deal more to say about it. She looked supremely ridiculous as she darted forwards to receive Frank, and officiously did the honours. She pressed him to dinner, and supper, and breakfast, and bed, all in the same breath. In fact, there was nothing to which she did not press him. She had not felt so much at her ease for a long time, and she gave full vent to her satisfaction by nods and winks, and what she considered quite conjugal *apartés* to Lord Overdale.

Frank's presence acted like a charm. Next morning, everything seemed to wear a brighter aspect. Lord Overdale's brow was clearer when he appeared at breakfast; he received Chloe's offering more graciously than he had done of late, and she presented it more gracefully. Charles was still far from being at his ease, but he was more able to conceal his disquietude than he had been for some time.

Notwithstanding this universal improvement, Frank soon perceived that something was wrong. Isabella's countenance, especially, betrayed traces of unusual emotion, at least to Frank's eyes. He knew her well; he interpreted every tone, every look. Not the slightest

shade passed across her mind that was not, to him, revealed by her face.

Isabella also read Frank's thoughts with unusual clearness. She perceived that he looked ill, and out of spirits; and she saw that in his unselfishness he exerted himself to conceal his own depression, that he might cheer and comfort her.

In the course of the day, Frank received a summons to attend Lord Overdale in his study. The old peer was sitting at his writing-table; papers were before him. He motioned Frank to sit down.

There was a short silence. As Lord Overdale fixed upon Frank his searching glance, his brow gradually relaxed. Rectitude and nobleness were written on that face, in characters so unmistakable, that Lord Overdale, for a moment, forgot his usual caution.

"My invitation to you," he began, "was, I must confess, not entirely disinterested. I have business which I wish you to transact for me without delay. I want your assistance, Mr. Tyrrell; I may, perhaps, require your advice."

Lord Overdale soliciting help and counsel!

Frank was amazed. His countenance must have betrayed his feelings, for Lord Overdale said, with a sort of half smile in his eyes:

"It is seldom that I require assistance; still more seldom that I ask advice. I have made up my mind to trust you."

"I will do my best to deserve your confidence."

Lord Overdale took up a paper which lay upon the table. "Do you remember this document. It is the draft of the settlement upon my nephew, which I instructed you to draw up. I wish it to be altered. I intend to double the sum I then named; but this not for his sake, but for Miss Romayne's. I wish it plainly to be understood that it is entirely on Miss Romayne's account that I have determined to make this alteration." Lord Overdale paused, as if hesitating how to proceed; then he added, somewhat hurriedly, "You had better ask Charles Stanly if he is satisfied with this arrangement."

"I have no hesitation in affirming that it exceeds his expectations."

"But there is one condition——"

Frank involuntarily shuddered. He could find no words to ask its nature.

"And that is, that my nephew's marriage shall take place immediately."

"Oh, no, no! I cannot undertake that mission," Frank exclaimed, with a look of acute pain. Then, checking himself, he said, "Pardon my interruption. I am ready to serve you. In what way can I do it?"

Again Lord Overdale's piercing grey eyes were full upon Frank.

Frank changed colour. It required a great effort of self-possession to maintain an attitude of tolerable composure.

"I am sorry to impose a disagreeable task. But it must be done. I wish you to inform my nephew and Miss Romayne of the purport of this paper, and of the condition upon which depends its fulfilment."

Frank took the paper, and, glancing his eye over it, saw an alteration in pencil, written upon the margin, to the effect that two instead of one thousand a year was to be settled upon Charles, but revokable at the will and pleasure of Lord Overdale.

"You will be so kind as to have the paper executed immediately, and brought to me for signature, that is, if my nephew agrees to the stipulated condition. Do you doubt it?" he suddenly and fiercely exclaimed.

Frank felt that his countenance had again betrayed him, but out of the excess of his agitation he found courage to say, with extraordinary calmness, "I have no positive reason to do so."

Frank's command of voice amazed Lord Overdale. He felt unbounded respect for a man whose self-possession exceeded his own, and it was in a tone almost confidential that he said: "I will own to you that I had doubts upon the subject."

"Indeed!" Frank's emotion was so great that he could not resist an exclamation. "I beg pardon for interrupting you, but——"

"I understand," said Lord Overdale, slowly and significantly. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he proceeded: "Still I will trust you. There is a mystery hanging over my guests which I cannot fathom. Will you do it for me?"

"I will do my best. But perhaps you can

inform me in what way I am most likely to do it with success?"

"I think that if you sound my nephew and Miss Romayne with respect to the condition I attach to the fulfilment of this paper, you will be best able to read their minds, and unravel the mystery to which I allude."

"I will obey your commands, although I can foresee but one possible result. Miss Romayne is constant, Charles Stanly honourable."

It was now Lord Overdale's turn to interrupt by an "Indeed!" but bearing a signification very different to Frank's exclamation of surprise. The smile of bitter incredulity which passed over the old peer's features, finished his sentence, with a meaning far stronger than could have been expressed by words.

"I have known Charles Stanly from infancy, and have always found him the soul of honour," said Frank, heartily.

"Mr. Tyrrell, your generosity blinds your discrimination," he began; and then, as if some sudden thought had struck him, he leant his head upon his hand, and fell into

a reverie. "And yet I have sometimes thought"—he seemed speaking to himself—"I have sometimes hoped—but no, no, it is folly to expect it." Another short silence ensued; then starting, as if surprised at his own absence of mind, he resumed his sentence where he had broken it off—"But I will not now dispute the point. He may be all you think him—I will hope he is."

He bowed dismissal plainly but politely. Frank took up the paper, and was about to put it into his pocket, when Lord Overdale stopped him, saying:

"No; you may as well leave it here till you have cleared up all doubt."

Charles was gone out upon one of those long solitary rambles in which he now constantly indulged. Frank, therefore, determined to speak first to Isabella.

In order to secure an uninterrupted conversation with her, he asked her to walk. She put on her bonnet, and they went into the shrubbery. They proceeded for some time in almost absolute silence. Frank could not make up his mind to open the conversation.

It was difficult to speak that, of which he dared hardly think.

"Isabella," he said, at last, "I have a message to deliver from—— What is the matter? Are you ill?" he exclaimed, seeing her change colour as she sank down upon a bench.

"Hush!" said Isabella, laying her hand upon his arm. "Hush! listen!"

Frank looked round in surprise. He had neither seen nor heard anything extraordinary.

The bench upon which Isabella sat was shaded by a drooping ash. Just behind it, a yew hedge, thick and closely planted, shut out the view beyond, and divided the shrubbery from the flower-garden.

Isabella sat in an attitude of breathless attention; her eyes were fixed upon the hedge, as if endeavouring to see through it. Frank, in silence, sat down beside her.

For some moments, no sounds were audible; then Charles Stanly's voice spoke, in soft but urgent accents of entreaty,

"I implore—I beseech you—stay, if but

for one instant. If you knew how long I have sought you—how often I have watched for you—how I have longed for this moment —you would not, could not, leave me thus. Oh, for God's sake, Chloe!"

But no answer was returned to his entreaty. An exclamation of disappointment was heard to escape from Charles, and then all was still.

Frank dared not speak nor look at Isabella. His delicacy recoiled from the idea of exulting in his superior judgment. Charles had proved himself what Frank had predicted—weak, vain, fickle. His words were sufficiently plain, but the tone in which they were spoken had in it a meaning far deeper. His sympathies for Isabella were so strongly roused, that, at that moment, he would have given ten years of his life to make Charles deserving of the attachment which, as he believed, Isabella still felt for him. He forgot his hopes and his fears—he forgot everything but her suffering. In Isabella's grief, his own was lost. Love triumphed over selfishness.

There was a long pause. Isabella spoke at last, in low, tremulous accents:

"Oh, Frank! I have much, very much to tell you. For some time a heavy weight has hung over me. Thank God you are come. I would fain consult you; I would fain open my heart to you——but," she added, struggling with her emotion, "another time perhaps—not now."

By an extraordinary effort of self-control, Frank was able to say with tolerable composure:

"First, you must let me speak to you, Isabella. I have business to communicate. I have a message from Lord Overdale, which must be told without delay."

He paused to summon fresh courage. He felt as if he never should pronounce the fatal words. Each syllable was like a dagger in his heart.

"Lord Overdale's intention in inviting me here was to make me a medium of communication between himself and his nephew. I have just left Lord Overdale, and he desires me to tell you that it is his intention to double

the sum mentioned in the former settlement upon Charles Stanly. Instead of one thousand a year, he means to settle two upon him." Frank paused, and hesitated.

"He is generous," said Isabella.

"But there is one condition."

"And what is that?"

"Your immediate marriage with Charles Stanly. Thank God I have said it," he added, mentally.

"That cannot be," said Isabella, very firmly, but very gently. "You know it as well as I do—that must not be. Help me, Frank; to you I look for assistance and advice."

Frank turned away from her. He felt a flush of pleasure rise to his temples. For worlds he would not let her see it, lest she should divine its cause.

At the end of a few moments, he said, in a voice which he endeavoured to make calm and professional: "I cannot advise you here. I am now speaking strictly in my legal capacity. I am a mere instrument in the hands of Lord Overdale, and as such, it is my duty, without comment, to convey to you his message, and to give him your answer."

"Does our old friendship go for nothing?"

"Oh, Isabella." He seized her hand, then he threw it from him, and resuming his formal manner, he said, gravely:

"In this matter you must decide for yourself. I cannot—I *dare* not advise you here."

There was something in his intonation as he pronounced the word dare, which infused extraordinary courage into Isabella's heart. She rose from her seat, and stood before him in her imposing, but graceful attitude.

"Go," she said—and her voice vibrated with energy—"go back to Lord Overdale, and tell him this from me. The marriage *must* be postponed—at least for a time. If he choose to revoke his settlement, I cannot help it. If my acting thus is detrimental to Charles Stanly, I regret it; but I cannot change my purpose. There is a limit to man's frailty, there is a limit to woman's endurance." She paused for a moment, then proceeded: "But also tell Lord Overdale, that I appreciate his generosity, and am most grateful for his kindness."

She drew herself up with dignity, and walked away. Soon, however, she stopped, and re-

turning to the spot where Frank stood gazing at her, she put her arm within his, and said, earnestly:

"Whatever doubts or fears may distract me, whatever ingratitude or falsehood may beset me, there is on earth one being whom I may blindly trust. Is it not so, Frank Tyrrell?"

He answered by a look only; but it called tears into her eyes. That look carried her back to the happy days of childhood, when she, his little pupil, used to watch his countenance for approval and encouragement.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following day Frank found an opportunity of speaking privately to Charles. He told him the reason of Lord Overdale's sudden summons. "It is," he said, "in order that I may transact some business in which you are concerned. I am now at liberty to tell you what your uncle intends to do for you; he means to settle two thousand a year upon you during his life."

At this intelligence, Charles's countenance brightened a little; still his pleasure was not such as it would have been six weeks before. A certain vague uneasiness was perceptible on his countenance, and it was with an averted eye, and a strange quiver in his voice, that he said:

"That is more than I expected of him."

There was a short pause. A choking sensation at Frank's heart deprived him of words. The scene which he had overheard in the garden on the preceding day was present to his mind; at that moment, the sensations it awakened were those of unmixed dislike towards the man who could deceive Isabella; the advantage to himself was forgotten, and he turned away from Charles with a sort of loathing.

But Charles's agitation was too excessive to let him perceive what was passing in Frank's mind. Conflicting and contradictory feelings tormented him. He was quite unprepared for this message from his uncle. The latter had of late been more than ever distant and cold. Charles had been living on from day to day, purposely stifling thought. He spent his time in violent exercise, either on foot or on horseback, so as to allow himself no leisure for reflection. He dared not scrutinise his heart.

At last Frank was able to proceed. "The immediate execution of the deed depends——"

"Stay!" said Charles, vehemently interrupting him. "Before I hear a word more, I must insist upon one thing. I will agree

to whatever my uncle pleases, with one exception. Let there be no further delay to my marriage with Isabella. On this point only he will find me inflexible. The engagement has already pended too long. I will not hear of further postponement."

Frank was thunderstruck. With every word Charles spoke his astonishment increased. He had fully reckoned upon Charles being at least as anxious as Isabella to gain time. He was so utterly unprepared for this burst on Charles's part, that he remained for some moments unable to make any answer. Charles went on speaking hurriedly, and with great eagerness:

"I am in daily expectation of a letter from Lord Derwent. When I last saw him, he told me that he should, about this time, have a proposition to make me, and one with which he was sure I should be satisfied. His performances usually exceed his promises; and even were it otherwise, I have no fears on Isabella's account. Her views are moderate; and I have learnt, from sad experience, that the merest competence is preferable to long waiting. I want *no* settlement from my uncle.

All I ask, is his permission to marry immediately—mark me, *immediately*. Tell him so, Frank, from me. Tell him that a speedy conclusion is important—essential to my happiness."

"Have I wronged him?" thought Frank, within himself. "Has selfishness so entirely perverted my judgment? Are my suspicions groundless? And yet—and yet——" But he stopped the current of thought which suggested itself, and proceeded in a tone which he vainly endeavoured to make cordial:

"There is no difficulty as regards your uncle. The objection will proceed from another quarter—Isabella."

"She will raise no objections; I am sure of her acquiescence."

"Do not be too sure. My belief is——"

"And upon what grounds do you rest your belief? I should think that I, of all human beings, ought to know her best."

"By Lord Overdale's desire, I spoke to her yesterday."

"Indeed! and you found her obdurate?"

The incredulous smile which accompanied these words, roused Frank's indignation.

Charles's security savoured of coxcombry, almost of indifference, and provoked Frank beyond endurance.

"Shall I tell you Isabella's own words?" he said, a little sternly—"simply these: 'The marriage *must* be postponed;' and she desired me to repeat them to Lord Overdale."

"Perhaps, at the same time, you may be so obliging as to repeat mine also," said Charles, in a loud and angry voice. "The marriage must *not* be postponed; and by God! it *shall* not. If Isabella cared for me, she would know that, circumstanced as we are, delay means rupture. If she chooses to throw obstacles in the way, she must take the consequences. It is no fault of mine; but it would be my fault if I allowed myself tamely to be, at her pleasure, taken up and set down. If she expect it, she will find herself mistaken. Four years ago she would not have acted thus. If time has lessened the attachment which I once believed unchangeable, I can only regret that it is so. *I* am not to blame; my conscience acquits me. My feelings are still the same. That this is true, the eagerness with which I desire an immediate conclusion of our

marriage will sufficiently testify. You may, if you choose, say this to my uncle. I will, at all events, speak my mind plainly."

Charles turned away and left the room. Frank remained, uncertain what to think, or how to act. He could not for a moment doubt but that Charles was sincere in the wish he expressed. Frank knew him to be incapable of deliberate falsehood. Indeed, he was naturally incautious and unguarded; and more than once, he had pursued his ends with unnecessary straightforwardness, and thus failed of attaining his object. Of interested motives, Frank entirely acquitted him; in fact, he had always been reckless as regarded money. Such being Charles Stanly's character, there seemed no possible motive for his present conduct, excepting that which he himself avowed—*i. e.* undiminished attachment to Isabella.

Yet Frank could not silence his misgivings. His former disapproval of Charles had now settled into dislike. His conduct of late had been more than thoughtless; it had been unprincipled, almost profligate. The conversation he had overheard proved it. There was

more than common gallantry in his behaviour to Chloe; if not, why was his manner so different in public and in private as he had even in one short day observed it to be? Frank knew that Chloe was a coquette, and that all men think it fair game to flatter and flirt with a coquette. But such conduct, venial under ordinary circumstances, became unpardonable as the case now stood. That the man who was engaged to Isabella Romayne should flirt, or even look, at any other woman, was of itself a crime in Frank's eyes; but when that woman was her own sister, no words could qualify his disgust and abhorrence.

If Charles Stanly's conduct perplexed Frank, he could not explain Isabella's either. However, he determined not to judge either rashly, but to watch and wait.

On leaving Frank, Charles went in search of Isabella. He believed that now, as of yore, he could sway her by a look or word. He never doubted but that his influence over her was undiminished, and that he could get her to acquiesce in any wish of his.

Unfortunately for Charles, Isabella was not alone. It was a rainy afternoon. Madame

Rodostomus was in the drawing-room, and for upwards of an hour and a half upon the point of leaving it; but she had always just one word more to say, which she never finished saying. She went at last; but no sooner was she gone, than Chloe arrived. True, Charles might easily have asked Isabella to send her sister away; or he might have begged her to give him a few minutes' private conversation in another room; but this would have suggested ideas of mystery; and somehow, Charles shrunk from any appearance of mystery in Chloe's presence.

The dressing-bell rang, and all chance of speaking to Isabella was over for that day. Charles persuaded himself that he was much disappointed, but, in fact, he was not a little relieved at the postponement of a conversation which he dimly foresaw would not be agreeable.

The dinner passed off better than it had done for some time. Frank exerted himself to keep up the conversation, and he was well seconded by Lord Overdale, who could be remarkably agreeable when he chose, and he

chose, on this occasion, to be so. Charles was amazed, not only at the vast fund of information possessed by his uncle, but, still more, at the peculiarly agreeable mode in which he conveyed it. He spoke his mind with decision, but without dogmatism; and though his language was refined, it was never pedantic.

An express arrived late in the evening with a packet of letters for Lord Overdale. He opened it carelessly, but evinced some surprise when he found that, among many others, there was one directed to Charles. "This letter is important," he said, handing it to his nephew, as he glanced significantly at the superscription. Derwent was written in the corner. Charles eagerly tore open the envelope.

As he read, his cheek flushed, and his eye sparkled. His first impulse was to turn towards Chloe. He even stretched out his hand, as if to give her the letter. But he suddenly checked himself, and coughing, in order to conceal his confusion, he put the letter into Isabella's hands.

She took it, and tried to read it, but the

words danced before her eyes. She had seen Charles's movement, and understood it too well.

At length the cold shudder passed away, and the letters ranged themselves in their proper places. She was now able to comprehend that the letter was from Lord Derwent, and a most gratifying one for Charles. He offered him the post of secretary to the embassy at Paris, and told him, that if he accepted it, he must not long delay his departure from England.

While Isabella was reading the letter, Charles seemed to be reflecting profoundly. Indeed, he was so deeply absorbed in thought, that he started when Isabella touched his shoulder, to attract his attention, in order to return the letter.

He almost snatched it from her in his eagerness. Then, rising abruptly, he went up to Lord Overdale, gave him the letter, and said:

"My acceptance or my rejection of the post offered me shall depend upon your wishes. But upon one point even your wishes cannot bias me. However, I have been led to

believe, that in this respect, they correspond with mine—I mean, the immediate fulfilment of my engagement to Isabella. My dear uncle, if you have any regard for my feelings, let the ceremony take place under this roof, and especially let it take place as soon as possible. No words can express how extremely anxious I am to avoid any, even the shortest, delay."

Lord Overdale turned full upon Charles, and eyed him with one of his penetrating glances. Then, speaking with great suavity, but marked emphasis, he said:

"You have been rightly informed. My wishes in this respect do correspond with yours. It is most fortunate that your extreme anxiety should be upon a subject in which, to the best of my judgment, you are not likely to be thwarted. I shall immediately give directions——"

Here Lord Overdale was interrupted by Isabella. She seized one of his hands, and said, in an earnest, almost solemn manner:

"Stay! Lord Overdale. For God's sake, stay! In the name of all that is most sacred, let nothing be settled till I have spoken privately with you."

"To-morrow, in my study," was the laconic reply.

Isabella looked round for Chloe, that they might, as usual, retire together; but she had vanished, and did not again return.

When Isabella reached her room, she was surprised to find Chloe already in bed. She spoke to her, but without receiving any answer.

At the end of a few moments Isabella quietly approached the bed. Chloe, still dressed, was lying on it, with her face to the wall, and half hidden in the pillow.

"Dearest Chloe, are you ill? Speak to me, my darling."

Chloe turned half round, as if to reply; her lips moved, but only a low moan was audible; then she lifted up her folded hands in an attitude of contrite supplication.

Isabella understood the mute appeal; she saw that her sister was unequal to the effort of speaking. "Lie still now, dear child," she said, soothingly; "we will talk another time."

The agitation caused by the scene which

Isabella had just gone through, was, by Chloe's strange behaviour, increased to an almost unbearable degree. She too well comprehended what was passing in her sister's mind; but she felt that this was no time for explanation; Chloe was not equal to it, nor, indeed, was Isabella.

She began preparing for bed. The effort it cost her to do so with apparent calmness was well-nigh superhuman; but she was alarmed at her sister's state, and she carefully avoided whatever might increase her agitation.

Just as she was going to put out her candle Chloe started up, got off the bed, and began undressing very hurriedly. She did not speak to Isabella, and seemed to avoid looking at her.

But her trembling fingers were unable to perform their usual offices. In her nervous flurry she tightened the strings which fastened her dress, and pulled them into hard knots. She twisted and tangled her long tresses, but could not loose them; then, after many unsuccessful efforts, she seized a comb and pulled it violently through the thick masses, tear-

ing out handfuls as they hung down upon her shoulders in wild disorder.

Isabella gently and silently took the comb from her sister's hand, and soon brought the tresses into order. Chloe yielded passively; she seemed incapable of resistance. She let Isabella undress and put her to bed like a tired child.

There was something heartrending in this meek humility, so utterly at variance with Chloe's natural character. In all her various moods, in all her wild caprices, Isabella had never seen her thus. She had been everything by turns, excepting what she now was, feeling and tender.

The light had been some time extinguished, when Isabella heard Chloe rise softly, and steal on tiptoe towards her bed. "Are you asleep, Isabella? Can you sleep without having kissed and forgiven poor Chloe?"

It was thus that since her early childhood, Chloe, whenever she had displeased her sister, used, the last thing at night, to sue for her kiss of forgiveness. She never would sleep under Isabella's displeasure.

"Dear Chloe!" she said, as she thought of the innocent happy child whom she had loved with a mother's tenderness. "Dear little Chloe!" And she kissed the tears from the hot and swollen eyelids.

"Oh, Isabella!" whispered Chloe, winding her sister's arms tighter round her—"oh, Isabella, I love you; indeed I do. You do not know how well I love you."

Chloe crept upon the bed, and nestled close to her sister, as if for safety and protection. Isabella felt the scalding tears fall fast and thick, and she could hardly restrain her own. At length Chloe sobbed herself to sleep in her sister's arms, as she had often done before.

A multitude of undefined and conflicting feelings struggled in Isabella's bosom. It was in vain that she tried to reflect calmly, to recollect how things had, by slow degrees, come to their present miserable pass. It seemed but yesterday since all had been so different! since perfect confidence reigned between the sisters. It seemed but yesterday since Chloe used to laugh, and dance, and prattle like a thoughtless child. The hour of

preparing for bed used to be that of most intimate confidence. It was then that Chloe loved to recapitulate the events of the past day, and to react its scenes with her inimitable humour and grace. But times were altered now.

Isabella had no need to ask when the change begun. Charles Stanly's image rose unbidden in her mind.

That "Chloe!" she had heard him pronounce in the garden, had excited painful emotions within her. A certain feeling of mortification, almost of irritation, was uppermost in Isabella's mind. What woman can calmly see herself set aside, and supplanted by another?

Isabella felt dissatisfied with herself. Her mind was not one that could long harbour an unworthy sentiment. She no longer loved Charles Stanly; could she, therefore, be jealous of him? Love has a right of jealousy, but without it such a feeling is akin to envy. Isabella shuddered as she recognised this truth.

Gently disengaging herself from Chloe's

embrace, she rose, threw a shawl about her, and opened the sash. It was a clear, still night; not a breath stirred the air. A holy calm lay over the face of nature; the universe was as a vast temple, and all within it seemed hushed in voiceless prayer.

Isabella sank upon her knees, awed by the solemn silence. The firmament above was bespangled with clustering suns and worlds; beneath, the dewdrops glistened on the grass, as beautiful and as bright.

"Foolish little sparks!" she said within herself; "you should be ashamed to mock the fires which warm you into life. And yet," she added, "are they not each worlds, a globule, or a Saturn?—worlds equal in magnitude and in duration for the beings who people them? Shall not the sparks above pass away as the drops beneath, and who shall mark the void? Others will succeed them. Where there is space, there are worlds; and where there are worlds, there exist beings capable of giving and receiving enjoyment."

Isabella raised her hands to heaven, and prayed fervently. Her tears fell fast, but

they had lost their bitterness. That dark shadow had passed from her—darker by contrast with the spotless purity of her heart. She had conquered the feeling of which she was ashamed. She was lifted above the world and its struggles. Peace came upon her, like soft dew from heaven; that peace which passeth understanding.

She shut the window, and returned to her sleeping sister. Presently she slept also, and woke freshened and invigorated.

Chloe still slumbered uneasily. It was painful to see that childish brow furrowed with an expression of more than childish anguish.

"Chloe must be saved," was Isabella's prevailing thought. But how? She would consult Frank Tyrrell. He would assist her, he would advise her. He was dispassionate and unselfish beyond all other men. He would be her anchor of salvation.

This conviction infused into Isabella's mind a hopefulness such as she had not felt for long. It was with a light step, and almost with a light heart, that she went in search of him.

She knew that he was an early riser, and she found him, as she expected, in the library. "Oh, Frank!" she said, in her quiet, trustful manner, "I want to talk to you—I want to consult you."

"Isabella!" he exclaimed, with joyful fervour, as he flew to meet her. Then suddenly pausing, he added, hurriedly: "But do not ask me for advice—I am the last person whom you ought to consult."

"Well, then," she said, "all I ask is, that you will listen to me patiently, and then advise or not, as you please."

Frank tried to speak, but he dared not trust his voice. Isabella perceived his emotion, and went on:

"I dread the idea of a private interview with Lord Overdale. He will not relish what I have to say to him. I need not tell you what that is—the postponement of which I spoke yesterday. I am more than ever convinced of its necessity."

Frank turned away his head. He had always believed that Isabella would one day become aware of her delusion with regard to Charles. Had she really done so? and what

might follow? He felt that his hopes were written in his countenance, but he did not, as yet, wish Isabella to perceive them.

"On this point," she proceeded, "I require no advice. My mind is made up. But I want to consult you respecting Chloe and Lord Overdale. Why does he insist upon that condition, which I cannot, and will not fulfil?"

"The reason is easily told. Lord Overdale wishes to please Chloe, and to incline her in his favour."

"Then you think that he really intends proposing marriage to her?"

"Yes, I do, though he has never dropped the slightest hint upon the subject."

"Chloe will never marry him."

"Why not? She is ambitious."

"You know, as well as I do, why she will not."

"I know your meaning," he said, in a low voice; then, resuming his former manner, he proceeded: "Yet, though she is not in love with him, she may marry him; she must admire his character."

"It is, indeed, a very remarkable character

—a great and noble character. She might be happy with him," Isabella added, half speaking to herself.

"No doubt she might. And such an alliance would satisfy her ambition. As I said before, she is very ambitious."

"Frank!" said Isabella, in a tone of reproof, yet somehow, and to her own surprise, it conveyed no notion of displeasure, "you are not speaking what you think. It is not right, it is not kind of you."

"May I speak what I really think?" he eagerly exclaimed. Then, checking himself, he added: "But of myself another time; the present business is urgent. You were speaking of Chloe."

Without seeming to observe the tremulousness of his voice, which, indeed, was no less apparent than that of her own, Isabella proceeded: "I always foresaw that a time would come when a real affection would cure the levity I have so often deplored in my sister's character. That time has now arrived."

"Do you really think it?" he exclaimed, with vehemence. Then, as if ashamed of it, he added, sorrowfully: "But you may be mis-

taken. I am afraid you are mistaken. Chloe's egregious coquetry——"

"Has entirely left her. You must have observed it. And there can be but one reason for so extraordinary a change. I know my sister's character. She is the type of her race; her feelings are at once sudden and deep, her impressions vehement and indelible. Now, I want you to explain these things to Lord Overdale, in the manner you judge most likely to convince him of the truth of what I say. He need not think of marrying Chloe. She will never consent to be his wife."

"And why not?" spoke a voice of thunder behind them.

Both started. Lord Overdale, unperceived by either, had come into the room, and overheard Isabella's last words.

"Will you be so kind as to favour me with the reasons which enable you to judge so decidedly of the wishes of others?" he added, in his most imperious manner.

"Mr. Tyrrell will explain my meaning better than I can do myself," said Isabella, as she turned from them, and walked slowly away.

"Well, Mr. Tyrrell," said Lord Overdale, as soon as she was beyond earshot, "is it your pleasure to unravel the mighty mystery of Miss Romayne's words? She is, I conceive, under some strange misapprehension. What was it she required you to say to me?"

"That she is determined to postpone her marriage."

"Ha!" exclaimed Lord Overdale, with violence. Then, recollecting himself, he proceeded in his usual stately manner: "And she has acquainted you with her reasons?"

"Partly," said Frank, with some hesitation, for he shrunk from the idea of acting precipitately in a case which so deeply involved his own happiness. "I know some of them, and I have suspicions——"

"Suspicions!" interrupted Lord Overdale. "Suspicions! I will not hear of suspicions! A man of honour has nothing to do with suspicions. I know, or I ignore——"

A pause succeeded. It was a long one. Lord Overdale bent upon Frank his scrutinising glance, and Frank sustained it bravely. The old peer wondered how much Frank knew of what was passing in his mind, and as he

marked the manly countenance before him, his soul yearned for sympathy; for a moment he was on the point of opening his whole heart to one who could so well appreciate just and honourable motives, and in whom he might safely trust. But Lord Overdale yielded to his old habits of caution. He misdoubted his own judgment; he chose to believe that a character such as Frank's appeared to him was so exceptional, as to be hardly real. Lord Overdale, with all his experience and all his insight, was most expert at deciphering the dark side of human nature. He saw through the plots of ambition or the wiles of cunning, but he was apt to misconstrue pure and noble motives. Too much light dazzled his mental vision. He was bewildered by Frank's straightforward honesty.

"I have neither leisure nor inclination to weigh suspicions, or to speculate upon them. I am resolved to bring matters to a conclusion, one way or the other. Tell Miss Romayne so from me. She must marry my nephew immediately, or give him up at once, and for ever."

"I will execute your commands, although

I have little expectation of their producing the result which you desire."

"Allow me to judge for myself. I deliberate before I resolve, and when once resolved, I am inflexible. Thank you, Mr. Tyrrell," he added, with his bow of dismissal.

"Suspicions!" muttered Lord Overdale to himself, as soon as Frank had left him. "Suspicions! I will know of none such."

He walked slowly through the corridor which led to the breakfast-room. Two figures stood at the further end of it. Lord Overdale immediately recognised Charles Stanly and Chloe, apparently just returned from the flower-garden, for she held flowers in her hand, and her bonnet was slung over her arm. Charles seemed to be talking to her, low and earnestly. Lord Overdale did not slacken or hasten his step, but advanced with his usual heavy tread. Yet neither Charles nor Chloe were aware of his approach; both started violently when he came up with them.

He took no notice of Charles's evident confusion, but offering his arm to Chloe, led her, in silence, in to breakfast.

Frank did not appear. In answer to Lord Overdale's inquiries whether he had breakfasted, one of the servants replied that he desired to breakfast in his own room.

When the meal was over, Lord Overdale asked Chloe to accompany him to another room, and grant him a few moments' private conversation. She bowed acquiescence, and he led her to the study.

CHAPTER VII.

When the door had closed behind Lord Overdale and Chloe, Madame Rodostomus looked up with a queer, puzzled sort of expression. She stared first at the door, then at Isabella, and then at the door again. It was evident that some idea connected with one or both had arisen in her mind, and was vainly struggling to pierce through the maze of her faculties. Presently she took her spectacles out of her pocket, wiped them carefully, and, placing them deliberately on her nose, went through the same process of observation. This additional source of enlightenment did not, however, afford her the intelligence she desired; she could not get clearly at her own meaning. By way of disentangling

it, she made one of her random ejaculations, and exclaimed, suddenly:

"Isabella, my dear, I wish I were your daughter."

This singular apostrophe was so very unexpected, that it roused Isabella from a deep and painful reverie into which she had fallen. She could not help uttering an exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, that's it," said the old lady. "I see it all now. I wish he had spoken to you instead of to Chloe; but as I've no mother, he speaks to my daughter, which is, to be sure, the next best thing; still I had rather it had been you. I hope Chloe will behave properly, and show becoming decorum, and all that sort of thing. You would have done better, don't you think so, my dear?"

Isabella made no answer. Indeed, she scarcely heard what her mother was saying, so much was her attention engrossed by the extraordinary signs of emotion which were visible in Charles's countenance. While the old lady had been talking, he had changed colour repeatedly, and was evidently struggling with some very strong and powerful feelings.

But the widow, regardless alike of Isabella's anxiety and of Charles's agitation, went on addressing each alternately.

"Don't you see how it is, Mr. Stanly? Is it not quite plain, Isabella? There can be no doubt about it. I wish I was there now to hear what he is saying about me to Chloe."

Charles involuntarily made a vehement gesture. Isabella, who marked his increasing agitation, feared some violent outbreak on his part; she longed to get her mother out of the room; but aware of the old lady's inveterate tendency to opposition, she dared not betray her wish too openly.

"Dear mamma, don't you think we had better come up-stairs to your room, and talk it over." She moved to go.

Charles interposed, with extreme eagerness. "No, no, Isabella; don't go now. I want to speak to you. I must speak to you." His agitation was becoming more and more uncontrollable.

But he need not have been alarmed; the old lady had no idea of a tame *tête-à-tête* with her daughter. Isabella's patient way of listening to her absurdities, and her gentle refu-

tation of them, always provoked her beyond endurance. She had no fancy to have all the conversation to herself; she liked a little exciting contradiction, a little wholesome stimulus, and seeing that Charles, from whom she had expected this indulgence, was in no mind to afford it, she prepared to go in search of a less patient audience.

She had, however, as usual, an overwhelming supply of last words; there was the wisdom of Providence to be noticed, her own ill-luck to be commented upon, together with the remarkable things which happened to her and to nobody else; and, above all, the extraordinary fact of Lord Overdale's proposing to her instead of to either of her two daughters.

"Dear mamma, I hope you do not imagine—— Indeed, I am afraid you are under some delusion."

Isabella paused; she felt that her words would make no impression upon her mother; the fancy had taken too strong a hold of the old lady's mind. Besides, she was herself in no condition to argue, or even to speak. She saw that Charles's emotion was increasing every moment, and her dread of a scene in-

creased to an almost intolerable degree. She knew an explanation between them must come, sooner or later, but she was not yet prepared for it. An impending calamity is often more appalling than the calamity itself. Isabella felt at that moment quite unable to hear the confession which she imagined Charles was preparing to make her. After a moment's hesitation, she rose to leave the room.

"Isabella!" exclaimed the old lady, "where are you going to? You need not alarm yourself. I like being a third person as little as you like having one. Whatever I may be, my dear, in *those* matters I'm no fool; even my worst enemies never accused me of that." And, assuming a very knowing look, she facetiously pushed her daughter back to her seat, then kissing her hand to Charles, she left the room.

Isabella was hurrying after her mother. Charles's entreaty to stay only increased her haste to be gone. Her hand was upon the handle of the door, but a nervous grasp upon her arm held her back.

"For God's sake," he said, in a voice of urgent supplication—"for God's sake, let me speak to you—one word, but one word."

His earnest tone did not lessen her dread. The disclosure was coming; she felt it, and a strange flutter at her heart deprived her of the power of speech. Yet she chid herself for the weakness. Why not hear the worst at once? Come when it might, the scene must be a painful one; better get it over soon. She allowed Charles to lead her back to her seat.

For some moments he stood before her, flushed, agitated, and quite unable to speak.

She knew what he was going to say; she felt what was coming. He was about to make a confession of his attachment to Chloe, to throw himself upon her mercy, and sue for pardon. He was only going to tell what she was already aware of; why should she shrink from hearing it? She wished him to appeal to her generosity, to avow his fault openly; this was the only mode by which she could hope to preserve any esteem for him, and she wished to esteem the man whom she had once loved.

She saw his agitation, and strove to speak words of encouragement; but they died upon her lips; her heart sunk within her. She could not analyse her feelings. Was it his humiliation that she dreaded, or her own?

But the suspense was becoming exquisite torture; the short silence appeared to her of endless duration. "Charles!" she said, commanding her voice by an almost superhuman effort, "if you have any painful disclosure to make me, tell it at once; I am prepared to hear it. I believe I know what you would say. If it distresses you too much to speak the words, let it be supposed that I have heard them. Let us come to a clear understanding. Do not fear my displeasure, do not fear your uncle——"

He interrupted her by throwing himself impetuously at her feet. "Stay, for God's sake. No more, no more—— If you do not wish to drive me mad—if you do not wish to be responsible for some desperate act on my part, do not speak thus. Hear me, in mercy's name hear me. You will drive me to some fearful crime, if you refuse to hear me. Indeed, you misunderstand me; you altogether misunderstand me——"

Subdued by his vehemence, and perhaps relieved at being spared the pain of explanation, she said very gently:

"I do not refuse to hear you, Charles;

on the contrary, I wish for your confidence."

"Tyrrell has told you of my uncle's settlement?"

"Yes, he has."

"It is a handsome provision?"

"No doubt, he is generous."

"Generous! no, not generous; but simply just, for it is all for you, Isabella. He appreciates your worth. It is for your benefit that he makes this settlement. Tyrrell told me so; solely for your benefit, and I am proud to owe my fortune to you." He rose from his knees, and stood before her, as he said earnestly and solemnly: "I must soon leave England. Do not, I beseech you—I implore you by all that is sacred, do not let me leave this house without you. Come with me—be my hope, my peace, my guardian angel."

Isabella was thunderstruck. She doubted if she had heard aright. The eagerness of his manner told the sincerity of his wish.

The revulsion of her feelings was overpowering. Inarticulate and contradictory emotions rushed tumultuously into her heart. It was a terrible conflict. For a moment, it seemed

to deprive her of consciousness. She leant back upon her chair, and pressed her hands upon her eyes.

Charles perceived his advantage, and eagerly followed it up.

"In a few days I must go to Paris. Do not let me go alone. If you could but know all that has passed, all that is passing in my mind—if you had any idea of the immense importance of what I ask—if you knew all I have suffered, all I am now suffering, you would not keep me in this terrible suspense. It is agony, torture past enduring. With one word you may ensure—I do not say life and happiness to me here,—that were comparatively of little moment,—but life and welfare hereafter. Oh, say that word, and save me—save me from perdition."

Again he fell at her feet, and seizing one of her hands, pressed it passionately to his lips.

He had worked himself up to real enthusiasm. It carried him away. What at first had been forced, was now genuine and overwhelming. His words were deeply and truly felt; they came from the heart; they were eloquent and persuasive. At that moment he

really believed that he loved Isabella, and her alone; that if she were but his wife, he never should, or could love another woman. He was himself deceived and persuaded by his own vehemence, and it was in his old fond whisper that he said, "Oh, if you ever loved me, say yes! You did once love me—Isabella!"

How he pronounced that "Isabella!" None but he could pronounce it thus. Low and tremulous was its sound, like the murmur of distant music upon the breeze. Its tone awakened sympathetic chords, responsive vibrations in her heart. It carried her back to Eastrow, to the old days of their young affection. She forgot all the pangs which his inconstancy had caused; she forgot her painful struggles with her rebellious feelings; she forgot how she had cast out that ill-requited affection, though her heart bled, and her life had well-nigh ebbed with it. She forgot all, but that he was there, kneeling at her feet.

Scenes long gone by were called again into life. Forgotten sounds and images rose up fresh as of yesterday. Every look of love,

every murmur of affection, seemed to combine and concentrate, and exhale their thrilling perfume into that soft musical "Isabella!"

She thought of him at the grotto, when he had been so impetuous; she thought of him at their parting, when he had been so tender. Above all, she recollected that evening when his secret escaped him; when he betrayed what he longed to tell; when she heard with surprise what she so well knew.

She saw him bend low over the sofa, she heard him speak that mysterious revelation. His words seemed still vibrating upon the air; the emotions they had called forth became again rife within her—her heart was full to bursting. She knew, that what had once been true, was now only a vain counterfeit; she knew that his prayer was but the enthusiasm of the hour; that he was endeavouring to delude her, and to deceive himself. Nay, more; she was aware of the cause which prompted the self-deceit; she was aware that the vehemence of his present supplication was in proportion to his passion for another object; she felt all these things, and yet she could not, for the moment, disbelieve what

she knew was false. An uncontrollable weakness crept over her; and, overwhelmed by her long pent-up and conflicting feelings, she burst into tears.

"Oh, Charles! Charles!" she faintly murmured.

"Blessings on you!" he exclaimed, wildly. "You have saved me from misery—from perdition. Blessings on you—ten and ten thousand blessings on you." He embraced her knees passionately.

The door opened. Chloe stood before them.

She was pale as marble. Her features were rigid, cold, expressionless. Her eyes, strained wide open, evinced no sign of consciousness. The dilated pupils were fixed in a strange unmeaning stare.

She advanced a few steps, with the noiseless, uncertain tread of a person walking in their sleep. She seemed to glide forwards, rather than to move along the floor. Her look was directed towards the sofa on which Charles and Isabella sat, paralysed with terror; but she did not appear to see or notice them. No movement was perceptible

in her eye, nor was any change visible in her countenance.

When she had reached the centre of the room, she stopped, turned back, paused again for a moment, and passed, like a shadow, from their sight.

The apparition lasted but an instant. Charles and Isabella were awe-struck. There was something fearful, something preternatural about Chloe's appearance, something which made their blood run cold.

Before they had recovered voice or speech, Madame Rodostomus was in the middle of the room. "My dearest children!" she exclaimed, "congratulate your mother; it is the proudest day of her life. He has made me such a present! there can be no doubt of his intentions now—sent all the way to London for it! a real horse! a real Arab! If it only had been anything else, it would have been just the thing I wanted—but I cannot ride—never could—the sight of a horse terrifies me—but don't tell him so for the world, for I heard Jones explaining to the servants that the horse is for my lady that is to be! Can anything be more gratifying?

such delicacy! such forethought! such—— Don't you think so? Can't you speak?" added the old lady, indignant at the silence.

Charles replied something, he did not know what; but Madame Rodostomus held him back, beseeching him to do her a favour; it was of the utmost importance; her fate was in his hands, and he might save her life. Charles, longing to escape, promised anything, everything; but instead of thus obtaining his release, she fastened upon him still closer; and after a long preamble, which at any time would have been difficult to understand, and in his present excited condition was absolutely unintelligible, she concluded with "that horse will be the death of me, I am sure of it—it will kick me, or throw me, or kill me, or something! Just like my luck. Charles, would you try it for me—not that I want you to be killed either, but you ride so well, it won't hurt you near so much?"

While concluding her, as it seemed to Charles, interminable harangue, the old lady had dragged him to a door which opened upon the stable-yard. He let her lead him where she list; he had no power of resistance; his

brain seemed on fire; he was hardly aware of what was passing round him.

All the stable servants were assembled in the yard, eagerly examining a beautiful grey Arab, which a groom was leading up and down. They were talking loudly, and discussing his points and his paces. The noise and confusion of voices increased Charles's bewilderment.

He stood for some time, incapable of forming a thought. The servants appealed to him for his opinion of the horse; he gave it mechanically, and quite unconscious what he was saying.

Suddenly Madame Rodostomus screamed into his ear, "He is coming! he is coming! I hear his step. He'll want me to ride! oh! what shall I do? I shall die of fright! Do it for me, Charles, and I'll—— Hush! Lord preserve me, here he is!"

At that moment, Lord Overdale, followed by Jones, appeared from the house.

His step was elastic, his brow serene. His countenance wore an expression of inward satisfaction, so strikingly unlike its usual morosity, that it attracted the notice of all the servants. Mr. Jones answered their inquiring

looks by telling them with a mysterious nod and a portentous assurance, that something *h*extraordinary was going to *a*ppen; he believed *he* know'd, but he guessed nobody else did.

Lord Overdale approached Charles and Madame Rodostomus with extreme cordiality.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said; "what do you think of the horse? I am assured that though full of spirit, he is thoroughly broken in, and such as a lady may safely ride."

Madame Rodostomus took these civilities entirely to herself; but the word "spirit" increased her terror, lest he should propose to mount her on the dreaded animal. She clung frantically to Charles, whispering, "Offer to ride him, offer to ride him; he'll not kill you —at least, not so much?"

Charles did not pause to consider how much or how little he was likely to be killed; but willing to do anything to get out of his present intolerable situation, muttered some very incoherent words about trying the Arab.

Lord Overdale was all complacency, and even said something complimentary to Charles relative to his skill in horsemanship. At an-

other moment, these praises would have delighted him; he prided himself upon his riding, and any commendation from his uncle would have been gratifying; but now he neither heard nor heeded Lord Overdale's words.

Charles seized the reins, and, with one bound, vaulted upon the animal's back.

A shout from the assembled grooms, proclaimed their approval of this feat; but the Arab, either frightened by the noise, or affronted by this unceremonious mode of treatment, snorted, pawed the ground, and struck out violently with his hind legs.

For once Charles's boasted horsemanship failed him. His hand was rough, his seat unsteady. The animal soon discovered which of the two was master. He snorted again, as if in derision of his impotent rider, curvetted, reared up high in the air, indulged himself with two or three eccentric springs; and, finally, having secured the bit between his teeth, flew off like the wind.

CHAPTER VIII.

We return to Chloe. Silently she followed Lord Overdale out of the breakfast-room; he led the way to the study; not a word was spoken.

He entered first, shut the door, and sat down. Chloe remained standing before him in an attitude of deepest dejection.

"Take a seat," he said, gloomily, and pointed to a chair. She obeyed mechanically, and let herself sink into that nearest her.

"I understand it to be your wish that I should acknowledge my nephew as my heir?"

The delicate features, before pale as ivory, now glowed with the richest crimson.

"To comply with your wishes is my greatest pleasure." An involuntary tenderness pierced

through the cold, business-like manner in which he forced himself to speak.

Chloe bent gracefully forward, and folded her small hands, by way of thanks, upon her bosom.

Lord Overdale took a paper which lay upon the table. "Here is the draft of a settlement which I have made upon Charles Stanly. There remains but to execute and sign it. Will you look it over?"

"There is no need," she murmured, very softly. "I trust you. But why is it not yet executed?"

"I wished you first to read it."

She glanced over the paper, and her features lit up with pleasure. "Thank you, Lord Overdale," she said, with a smile he thought worth any price; "you are even more generous than I expected."

"Need I tell you, that in making this allowance, my object was to meet your approval?"

"Then sign it; sign it immediately."

A strange smile gleamed in his eyes, as he said, "One condition remains to be fulfilled. You are young and confident—I am cautious

by nature, and mistrustful by experience. Before I consent to sign this paper, I must be assured that the condition upon which I insist, shall be accomplished to the letter."

"Condition!" she exclaimed, while her lip curled proudly, and her eye flashed with indignation. "Are your bounties conditional? I scorn such."

"Stay a moment, and hear me to an end. What I am about to say, cannot, I should think, be displeasing to you." He paused, and looked fixedly at Chloe. Again his eye lit, and a smile, or rather the reflection of a smile—for it was so faint as to be hardly perceptible—passed across his features. Chloe involuntarily shuddered at the meaning it conveyed. Her agitation did not escape him, and it was in a very emphatic manner that he said: "This paper shall be executed, and signed, when your sister fixes her wedding-day."

Chloe buried her face in her hands.

"You have influence over Miss Romayne," Lord Overdale proceeded, in the same marked and measured tones. "I expect you to use it. I require you to ask her why, after an en-

gagement of four years' standing, she now insists upon delay. I desire to know——"

"What! What was that you said?" screamed Chloe, starting to her feet, while her whole face beamed with indescribable joy. "Isabella insists upon delay!"

There was something in that look of joy which caused Lord Overdale to shade his face with his hand, in order to hide its expression from Chloe. He felt that he had lost all command over his features; they were, indeed, working fearfully.

"What I tell you is strictly true. Your sister insists upon delay; but,"—again he paused, and suddenly withdrawing his hand, riveted his eyes full upon her, as he added very slowly, "she is as reluctant as my nephew is eager."

Chloe sunk back into her chair as if paralysed.

She did not faint—she did not scream. She uttered no sound, for she was in that strange state of mesmeric half-unconsciousness we experience in dreams. She longed to rise and fly from the room; yet she had no power to

move. She felt Lord Overdale's searching gaze still upon her, but a kind of vague terror prevented her from making any attempt to avert it.

At the end of a few moments he rose, and paced the room violently. Then he returned to his place, opposite to Chloe. His fist fell heavily upon the table; she did not start; she did not seem to notice it.

Again he spoke, but in a hoarse whisper, such as might raise the dead: "Do you take me for a fool? Do you take me for a madman? Why should I benefit a nephew whom I hate? I can have but one reason, and you know it. To please the sister of *Lady Overdale!*"

"Never!" she exclaimed, with a shriek so piercing as, for the moment, to throw Lord Overdale off his guard. "Never!" And she rushed from the room.

But no sooner had the door closed behind her, than the excitement with which she had spoken suddenly gave way. She felt sick and faint. Her head swam; her heart sank within her. A death-like sadness seemed to weigh her down. Her knees trembled, and she

was obliged to lean against the wall for support.

A vague instinct attracted her to her sister. She felt as if she could only be safe in Isabella's arms. It was there that all her childish woes had been told, all her tears dried, all her fears comforted. There she had always found peace and consolation.

But her feet seemed shod with lead. It was with difficulty that she moved from the spot. She dragged herself on, however, and threaded the corridors instinctively. She reached the sitting-room, opened the door, and saw Charles kneeling at her sister's feet.

A few moments afterwards she was again in Lord Overdale's study. How she got there she never knew.

She entered abruptly, and without knocking. She sank upon her knees before him. Then she took one of his hands, and pressed it to her lips. A low murmur escaped her, but no articulate sound.

"How am I to interpret this change?" he said, in a gentle voice. It was inexpressibly touching from the contrast to its usual sternness.

Her lips moved, but he could catch no word. The little hands clenched his, tightly and convulsively. They were icy cold, and her whole frame trembled.

He raised her up tenderly, and placed her in a chair. "Dare I understand what you must know I wish?"

Her eyes were still cast down. The dark lashes quivered upon her pale soft cheek, but her hold was firm, as the small fingers pressed his hand first upon her forehead, and then more tightly upon her heart. The pantomime was significant, but exquisitely modest.

Lord Overdale gazed at her for a moment with that look of fondness and of manly dignity which became him so well; then, stooping over her, he passed his arm round her waist, and touched her forehead with his lips.

Chloe neither shrank from his embrace, nor responded to it. She endured it. She was like a marble statue—as beautiful and as cold.

He spoke in low, but firm tones. "I thank you for your confidence. It is not misplaced. Nor will you abuse the trust I have vested

in you. You will not be tyrannical, nor I exacting."

She murmured some inaudible words. Their meaning was rendered plain by the graceful attitude of obedience in which she stood for a moment. Her person was thrown slightly forwards, and her hands crossed upon her bosom.

She moved towards the door, then paused, and said, in faint, tremulous accents, "Do not tell it yet—I mean to my sister. Let me tell her; but not yet, not yet."

She turned abruptly and was gone.

Lord Overdale did not detain her. He felt that happiness so intense must be concealed in presence of that angel of purity. He felt that if she had stayed he could not have controlled the impetuosity of his feelings. He shrank from giving way to a passion which seemed inappropriate to his years. Since he had experienced such emotions, a long half century had elapsed. Their revival seemed to recal the dead. But his heart swelled and his eye flashed with the consciousness that his love was both purer and stronger than that of his early youth. How inferior was the woman who had been

his idol then to that fair creature who was now his bride! That one could not have shown the feeling modesty of this. She could not have retracted a refusal with such exquisite delicacy and grace. Chloe far excelled her both in beauty and in talents. If she excited his passion, she satisfied his understanding. He was proud of his choice.

He paced the room with a quick firm tread. Presently he sat down, and tried to think, but he could not yet collect his thoughts. The beautiful image of her whom he should so soon call his own rose before his mind's eye, obscuring all others. Voluptuous phantasies fired his blood, but he kept them down manfully. He was determined to be master of himself.

He walked again, and with a more measured step. In passing a mirror he caught a glimpse of his own figure; he started with surprise. It showed him the image of a young man. He looked again, for he could hardly believe his eyes. Fifty years of care and of regret seemed at once effaced. He felt young and hopeful. An extraordinary

buoyancy took possession of him; joy, such as he had never known before.

In a few minutes Lord Overdale regained sufficient composure to write a note to Frank Tyrrell. He felt reluctant to communicate with him personally, lest he should betray the excess of his emotion. But he wished no time to be lost in legal preparations. He wished all things to be ready, so that the ceremony might take place as soon as Chloe should consent to it. He knew that whatever ridicule might attach itself to their union, on account of the disproportion of their years, would be forgotten, or at least silenced, as soon as it was concluded.

The note was short and to the point. He said that the mystery of which he had spoken was now solved. Mr. Tyrrell need take no further trouble on that account. But there was another matter with which he wished to trouble him. He desired that the draft of a marriage settlement between himself and Chloe should be drawn up immediately and secretly. These instructions were given briefly, and without comment.

Lord Overdale rather exaggerated the disparity of the ages. He knew that in such cases avowal disarms satire. He spoke of himself as of a very old man, of Chloe as of a child still. He desired that a handsome jointure should be assured to his widow, and that the settlement upon his nephew should be confirmed.

The directions were clear and judicious. He provided against every contingency. Not a point was missed. No superfluous word was written. It was impossible to misconstrue his meaning.

He read his note carefully over, folded, sealed it, and rang the bell. He then desired Jones, who presently appeared, to take it immediately to Mr. Tyrrell.

The note fell through Mr. Jones's astonished fingers. Every *h*inch of his body, to use his own expression, was dumbfoundered. He could not believe it was his own master. My Lord looked quite different like. It knocked him backwards with amazement.

"Why do you linger?" said Lord Overdale, authoritatively.

Mr. Jones made sundry attempts to pick

up the letter. Having at length succeeded, he conquered his amazement sufficiently to be able to tell Lord Overdale, that the head groom had just been to announce the arrival of the *H*arab. "Would his lordship be pleased to step to the yard and see the *h*animal?"

Lord Overdale left the study with a gesture of great satisfaction. The horse was to be a surprise for Chloe. She had complained that those in his stable were not sufficiently spirited to please her. He little thought, as he passed joyfully along the corridor, that Chloe was but a few steps from him, flying as for dear life.

That second interview had wrought her nerves to a fearful pitch. When she left the room she felt as one walking on a tempestuous sea; the floor seemed to rise like wild waves, then suddenly to sink down into an abyss. Her head swam round and round. Her senses were at once dulled and excited; her perceptions seemed at the same time vague and vivid. She knew that a dreadful calamity had befallen her, but she could not have told it. She was stunned as by a blow, but as yet

insensible to its impending agony. That strange state of double consciousness she had before experienced returned with renewed intensity. She seemed both a spectator and an actor; as in a dream, when we take part in impossible events without fear, and without surprise. Chloe was herself, and yet another. She had lost her identity. Passive and ardent, rebellious and resigned, she panted for the very happiness which she had renounced for ever.

The picture-gallery was near, and she turned mechanically into it. The sight of her favourite haunt recalled her, in some measure, to herself. She sank upon a sofa; the sofa where *he* had so lately sat beside her.

Then recollection rushed in, tumultuous and maddening. A horrible revelation manifested itself. Lord Overdale's words rang in her ear like a knell of worse than death. Their full meaning flashed suddenly upon her. She saw his look of love, and she shuddered, and the cold sweat broke over her.

At that moment she heard Lord Overdale's step in the corridor. A panic seized her; she imagined that he was in pursuit of her;

she fled in terror, and escaped by a door at the opposite end of the gallery.

She was far beyond ear-shot, but she still fancied his step approaching nearer and nearer; she rushed frantically up one corridor and down another. The objects she looked upon assumed strange, unearthly shapes. Horrible images pointed at her from the grim tapestry. The old portraits frowned and grinned hideously. They assumed the features of Lord Overdale; his eyes, fired with fierce joy, spoke a meaning too dreadful to dwell upon. Maddened with terror, she flew faster and faster; on, on, she knew not whither.

Presently she found herself in the open air. She had escaped by some unknown side door. She darted wildly across the garden, through the shrubbery, and into the thicket. The trees seemed to rush past her in her headlong flight.

Suddenly she stopped, as if transfixed, and stood listening intently. She had heard a sound, and all else was forgotten.

A horse, without his rider, flew madly past her. Then she felt what had happened, and

she hurried to the spot where she knew Charles lay.

She sank upon the grass beside him. "Oh, let me die—oh, let me die thus." He had taken her hand just as consciousness left her.

Her insensibility lasted but a moment; then she opened her eyes, and looked at him. She fancied herself at Eastrow, and a child again. She thought it was that day when he had saved her life. She thought it was that moment, when, having rescued her from the waves, he had laid her cold and clammy upon the grass, to see if she still breathed.

For there he was. Charles Stanly was bending over her and supporting her; or was it a blissful dream? Had she slept out her life here, and woke in heaven?

She murmured words soft and musical, for they were words of love; and her large eyes confirmed them, in language still more forcible and more eloquent.

He seized her passionately in his arms. "Chloe! my own Chloe!" he exclaimed, and imprinted upon her lips a long, long kiss. "My own beautiful Chloe."

She clung about his neck, in the ecstasy of

her joy, pouring out words of rapture, vehement, intense; such words as are spoken and understood once, and only once, in a lifetime.

Then suddenly she burst from his embrace, flung herself down upon the grass, and uttered a deep groan of anguish. "No, no, no," she sobbed, convulsively, "do not believe me. I said what was not. I spoke in madness. I do *not* love you, and I loathe myself."

She gave way to the violence of her agony. She wrung her hands, she tore her hair. She lay with her head bowed down to the earth. She dared not move; she knew that if she stirred she must look at him.

Charles's fall had been severe, and he was weak from loss of blood. He was overcome by the exertion he had made to support Chloe when she fainted. He sat down upon the ground, and leant against a tree. "Chloe," he said, feebly, "I am faint and ill."

At that sound, all power of resistance was at an end. She rose, and went to him; there was a deep gash in his head. In falling, he had hit his forehead against a stone.

Chloe bound up the wound with her scarf.

A copious flow of blood had probably saved his life, but he was weak and dizzy.

No assistance was within call. To leave him in his present state, in order to seek any, was impossible. Chloe sat down upon the grass beside him, and pillowed his head upon her lap.

How long they remained there, neither knew. They dared hardly breathe, lest they should destroy the spell which held them bound.

Presently, footsteps were heard in the distance. "Shall I help you to rise?" spoke Frank Tyrrell's voice; and he endeavoured to raise Charles to his feet. But the attempt to rise made him again turn sick and faint.

"Oh, do not touch him—do not move him!" exclaimed Chloe, in accents of unutterable tenderness. And she placed her hand upon his shoulder, in an attitude of fond protection.

"Exert yourself," said Frank, addressing Charles. "Assistance is at hand. The horse returning without his rider told what had happened. Lord Overdale has despatched

messengers in every direction, and Isabella——"

He was interrupted by an exclamation from Chloe. At the sound of her sister's name, she started, as if stung by an adder. In an instant, she was on her feet, and then, with a wild gesture of despair, she rushed away like one possessed by a demon.

Charles looked wistfully after her. Presently, he said that he would try to walk to the house. With the help of Frank and some of the servants, who had now joined them, he reached home, but not without great difficulty.

On the threshold they met Isabella. She had been to seek Charles in another direction. As soon as she perceived him, she went to him, with anxious words and inquiries.

A blush of shame mounted to Charles's temples. "Oh, do not look so kindly," he said, with emotion. "Do not speak so gently—that look, that voice, distract me; they are like daggers in my heart." He would have said more, but his eyes followed the direction of hers. Isabella had recognised the scarf with which his head was bound.

Whatever painful feelings the sight of that scarf might have excited, none were betrayed. Isabella gave her orders to the servants with thoughtful composure. She forgot nothing that might afford him relief.

A doctor had been summoned some time before Charles's return. He soon arrived, and pronounced Charles to be in considerable danger. The fever was very high. He was ordered to bed; a composing draught was administered. Frank passed the night watching by his side.

The sedative was long of taking effect. At first it irritated, instead of soothing the patient. The fever increased. Charles became more and more restless, and, at length, delirious.

It is an awful thing to listen to the wanderings of a mind unrestrained by reason. In such a case even the best might tremble, but Charles, unrepentant yet remorseful, offered a spectacle so horrible, that years afterwards Frank was haunted by it.

It was a fearful delirium. It was dreadful to listen to the ravings of an ill-regulated

mind, of an unstable nature, of an untrue heart. Poor Charles offered a sad example of the ravages of an unbridled passion. He was goaded by remorse, tortured by the stings of conscience, yet not repentant in the true sense of the word. He heaped reproaches upon himself, but made no good resolves for the future. What distracted him was not so much the consciousness of guilt as the non-gratification of his wishes. He bewailed the irremediable past, but summoned no strength for the time to come. Regret is not repentance. It evaporates in vain lamentations; true repentance is silent, but sins no more.

At the first symptoms of delirium Frank had locked the door, fearful lest any but himself should overhear disclosures, which it was important to conceal. Nor would he, for worlds, have had any other witness the humiliation of a man whom he had ever called friend.

What his feelings towards Charles now were he would not examine; he endeavoured to stifle any that might be unfavourable. Pity, indeed, predominated in his breast; Charles was suf-

fering, and Frank's only care was to soothe and comfort him.

But for a long time his efforts were utterly vain. Charles did not even seem to hear the friendly voice. He did not see, or did not recognise, who was beside him.

Charles alternately reproached himself and Isabella for the misery he was enduring. At one moment he called himself a monster, a perjured wretch, unworthy to live. He had betrayed the trust which an angel had reposed in him. Isabella was a superior being; it was impious not to worship her. At another moment, it was she who was to blame. She ought never to have listened to the vows of one whom she must have seen was not made for her. She ought to have known better. She should have perceived that he was not suited to her. She might have been his guardian angel, and she had plunged him into perdition. Then again, he upbraided himself for daring to breathe a word against the most perfect of human beings.

Towards midnight the fever increased, and the delirium became more violent. He called wildly for Chloe—his own Chloe; her whom

alone he loved. Was it his fault if he adored her? Who could see Chloe and not adore her? He must go to her; he must make her his; no human power should withhold him; no human law should restrain him; he must make her his, or perish in the attempt.

He fancied her near him, and his arms were extended to receive her; but Isabella interposed, and he gnashed his teeth in agony. Then he thought that Isabella was bound to him with fetters of iron, which he vainly struggled to rend asunder. They fastened themselves tighter and tighter as he wrestled with them. If he burst one, another and a stronger bond supplied its place. There was no hope, no help, no refuge.

The night passed in these and similar ravings. It was fearful to behold poor Charles staring wildly about him, continually starting up and struggling frantically with the bed-clothes; then, his features convulsed with pain, he fell back upon the pillow weak and exhausted. Frank's heart melted more and more at so sad a spectacle of impotent rage.

But this was the crisis. Charles gradually

became calmer. At length he lay quite still, his breathings were more regular, and at length he sank into a deep sleep.

"Poor boy!" thought Frank within himself, as he gazed upon the countenance, so fearfully distorted a moment ago, but now composed and tranquil. "Poor boy! so young, so handsome, so amiable! one who, with all his faults, it is impossible not to like; at last, I understand the illusion which held Isabella so long. But her eyes are opened now. I always knew that the time would come. It has come. Thank God for it!"

Frank watched by Charles's bed until the morning was pretty far advanced. The doctor then arrived, and reported so favourably of the patient, that Frank felt himself relieved from the necessity of further attendance.

Chloe had not appeared all the remainder of the day. Isabella left her unmolested. She felt that, after what had passed, it was best for both of them to commune with their own hearts, and to have time to reflect quietly and separately.

With her usual clear judgment, Isabella reviewed the past, and sought to fix her line

of conduct for the future. She reflected how painfully the sight of that scarf round Charles's head would have affected her some time ago; now it hardly moved her. This little incident was a consolation. It proved to Isabella the entire change that had taken place in her feelings towards him. The more she penetrated into the recesses of her mind, the more she was surprised to see how little her thoughts had of late been occupied by Charles Stanly. The prepossession had vanished. How came it that it had once engrossed her so entirely? How came it that the image which had dwelt in her heart was now expelled from it, or only remembered with a sigh of pity—pity for her misplaced affection? Had she not known from the first that they were unsuited to each other? Handsome, pleasing, attractive as he was, she had never been blind to his want of steadiness, to a levity of conduct, and laxity of principle, which she had always felt must, sooner or later, bear evil fruits. He had never really filled her heart; how came it that he had so strangely fascinated her imagination? A conscious blush overspread her features as these recollections

passed through her mind. She saw that she had never really loved Charles Stanly, but that her feelings had been swayed by his, her perceptions had been bewildered by his protestations of attachment; she had loved his love, and not himself. She had cherished a vain illusion.

And not only had she refused to listen to the dictates of her own judgment, but she had been deaf to the voice of her tried and trusted friend. She knew that Frank had spoken sooth, and yet she had wilfully, wantonly spurned his advice. How just were all his words! How exactly his prophecies had come to pass. And she had scoffed at the warning, which she knew was true.

And yet, instead of reproaching her for her weak folly, how generous, how noble had been his behaviour! When he found that he could not dispel, he sought to excuse an unpardonable delusion. With incredible unselfishness he had tried to remedy the evil he judged incurable. He had not only stood by Isabella despite her errors, despite her unkindness towards himself, but he had, for her sake, befriended Charles. Charles owed almost every-

thing to Frank's kindness. Frank had roused him from his thoughtless indolence, and excited his latent energies. Frank had obtained the post at St. Petersburg. Chiefly through Frank's influence the exchange to Paris had been brought about. During the four years of her injustice to Frank, he had carefully watched over the man she had preferred to him. And so far from seeking praise for what he had done, he always changed the conversation each time it bore any reference to the scenes in which he had acted such a noble part! Was ever generosity equal to his?

These thoughts occupied her all day. At night, when she retired to her room, she found Chloe in bed, and, as it would seem, asleep. Isabella moved noiselessly, not to disturb her sister; but Chloe raised herself slowly up in bed, and extended her arms to embrace Isabella.

Just as their lips were about to meet, Chloe faintly screamed, and started back.

"No, no, no," she said, in hollow, sepulchral tones. "I cannot—I must not. I dare not kiss you now!"

She threw herself down in the bed, and

buried her face in the pillow. Isabella spoke to her kindly and soothingly, but Chloe made no answer. For some time the bed-clothes heaved convulsively above her; but at last all was still, and Isabella hoped that sleep had brought with it calm and refreshment.

CHAPTER IX.

THE following morning Frank received a letter from his sister, Lady Ramsay. It was as follows:

"What are you about, my dear brother, and whence comes it that you have been so long without writing to me? You seem to forget my *isolement*, and the tedious hours that I am condemned to pass, solitary and alone. I endeavour to work in my vocation, and to spend my time as profitably as I can; still I pass many a weary moment, and am often overcome by *ennui*. But before I treat *de mes affaires*, I have a grand piece of news to communicate. Nothing less than the marriage of Aurora Foster with Mr. Smith, the new rector. Aurora is in the seventh

heaven, full of business and of bustle; working herself to death, but so happy! Good little soul! she makes me sad by the contrast with my poor *désœuvrée* self. But I am charmed to have been able to contribute to her happiness; and indeed, she may thank me for it. Without my assistance, Mr. Smith would never have come to the point, and I take great credit to myself for my dexterous management of the affair. You know that though I hate the Smiths in general, I have no objection to this Smith in particular; he was always the best of the villa set, and as old Foster's curate, one was obliged to be civil to him; then he was rather good-looking in his way, and *faute de mieux*, you know! He used to make the long winter evenings pass tolerably enough, and he would sometimes stay reading or chatting to us till one or two in the morning. Aurora used slily to stop the clock, that decorum might not be offended. At that time he paid little attention to Aurora; but when the poor old doctor died, and she became quite a little heiress, I saw a marked change in his manner; and the bright idea struck me, that a little arrangement might be

brought about between them. I lost no time in sounding Mr. Smith; but he, like some other gentlemen of my acquaintance, had a foolish prejudice in favour of good looks. I used my utmost eloquence to persuade him, that however desirable beauty may be for the wife of another, it is the last requisite for one's own. I can quite understand that *un homme du monde* may feel his vanity *froissée* by having to introduce a fright into society, but for a country clergyman, *c'est autre chose;* moreover, an ugly wife is a salutary mortification, as I told Mr. Smith, though not exactly in these words. I told him that if I were a man, I should especially avoid marrying a pretty woman, whose beauty continues to please other men long after it has become a matter of indifference to her husband. I know you don't agree with me, Mr. Frank, but indeed you are wrong; I have seen more of the world than you have done, and know better what sort of stuff men's hearts are made of. But to my story. Mr. Smith was obdurate and stiff-necked, and my rhetoric all thrown away; but just before we went to town last year, there arose a question about naming

a new rector. Money does much in things temporal as well as in things spiritual; even my sage brother will not dispute that point. So I set to work again; and by dint of suggestions and insinuations, I brought him to understand, that Aurora's money could not be better bestowed than by helping him to the living. I backed this up by representing—what, indeed, is not far from truth—that his nomination would be a blessing to the whole parish. He is really zealous in his calling; a little bit fussy, *mais enfin que voulez-vous!* Anything is better than old Foster's carelessness. Then I laboured to din into his ears that Aurora, having lived so long in the parish and made herself so justly beloved in it, was the one woman in the world most fitted for the wife of its rector. I saw that my arguments began to tell; but then, we left the country, *et les choses en sont restées là.* He, as you know, followed us to town, but went away without speaking the cabalistic word. He was presented to the living chiefly through my influence, and spent a great deal of money in the decoration of the church, more than he ought to have done, I believe. Be this as it

may, he was vastly sweet upon Aurora when we came back; but it was only two days ago that he made his formal, or informal proposals. It was a funny business, as you shall hear. One night—I am afraid it was one morning—Mr. Smith had been reading an old chronicle to us, about some *preux chevalier* of olden times, who, on returning from the crusades, instead of marrying a beautiful young lady, who was desperately in love with him, gave her up, in order to dedicate himself more fully to God. 'Dear!' exclaimed Aurora, 'what a *very* good man he must have been!' Mr. Smith agreed. 'But,' resumed Aurora, 'is it necessary for a good man to remain unmarried? There *are* good married men, you know.' Mr. Smith could not dispute this position; but argued, that though marriage may be good for the laity, it was otherwise in respect to the clergy. 'Dear!' said Aurora—and I saw the tears starting in her eyes—'then you really think a clergyman should not marry? Well, I dare say you are right; for you are so good, it would be such a pity for you to do anything wrong, certainly.' She could say no more, and took to blowing her nose

very hard. I looked at Mr. Smith, and I saw that he understood my meaning; I perceived, moreover, that he was flattered at Aurora's preference—a man is always flattered at *any* woman's preference—so I thought it expedient to leave the room. When I returned, half an hour afterwards, he had got beside her upon the sofa, but at the further extremity of it. I guessed at once by Aurora's face that the proposal had not been made; so I thought the best way of clenching the business was to take it for granted that all was settled, and go up and congratulate her; and before she could contradict me, Mr. Smith said something which I construed into a confirmation. Was that not cleverly managed?

"And now for my poor forlorn self. When Aurora is married she will have little time to devote to me, and I hate being alone. On account of my deep mourning, I cannot go into society; I think, therefore, that travelling would be a salutary distraction. I had a melancholy letter from mamma, the other day. She is sadly annoyed by Arethusa's conduct. Arethusa has quarrelled with Harry

Preston, because he had her hair cut off while she was delirious with malaria fever; she declares that she will never live with a man who was barbarous enough to make a fright of her. I think my presence might be of use to all parties. I always had more influence with my sister than anybody else; and with dexterous management, I have no doubt but that I might be able to reconcile this delectable couple. You know Harry Preston was always a favourite of mine, and liked me none the worse for being aware of the fact.

"I have almost made up my mind to pass next winter in Rome. I have also another, and a stronger reason for wishing to do so—I mean certain scruples, which my late conversations with Mr. Smith has excited in my mind concerning various religious points. Mr. Smith is much in favour of confession and absolution, and I am not sure whether I can quite agree with him or not. Now it seems to me that at Rome my doubts would be removed, and that I should be able to ascertain and establish my faith. Thus, on many accounts, I like the idea of a winter at Rome. The

only drawback to this plan is, that I shall have to travel alone. I wish you would come with me, dear Frank. I am sure the change would do you good.

"How are matters prospering with you? They ought to have been settled long ago. Neither Charles nor Isabella write to me, so I imagine that nothing is concluded. I thought you were sent for to help them through their difficulties. You are, no doubt, a clever fellow, Frank; but in some respects you are mighty slow; you have no turn for managing. I almost wish I had kept Lord Overdale to his, I must own, somewhat dubious invitation; if I had been with you, things would have progressed at a very different rate. At all events, let me hear from you forthwith. Think of what I have said about accompanying me to Rome. It will be a great shame if you let me go alone, and I cannot think what should keep you in England, after all your family has left it. You have money enough and to spare, and if you stay moping by yourself, my worst fears will be verified, and you will become a confirmed old

bachelor, cross, fidgety, and intolerable, and I will not acknowledge you as a brother. So now you see what you have to expect. Adieu.

"FANNY RAMSAY."

Frank shrugged his shoulders when he had finished reading. "How like poor Fanny!" he said to himself. "How characteristic! By her husband's death, and her diminished income, she loses much of her importance in England; but she may be rich and influential elsewhere. She is getting beyond the age for secular flirtations, so she has recourse to spiritual ones. Religious scruples indeed! —idleness, and love of intrigue. Well! in that respect, Rome may answer her purpose. Poor Fanny! she has a kind heart, and really is attached to me, notwithstanding the disagreeable truths I tell her. If I were to go with her, I might perhaps keep her out of mischief. But then——"

He fell into a reverie. It must have been a pleasing one, for his countenance lit up with pleasure as he rose, saying to himself: "I will show this letter to Isabella, and answer

it as she desires; I will go to Rome if she advises it—but if she detains me here—I dare not contemplate such happiness."

Accordingly, he went in search of Isabella, put Lady Ramsay's letter into her hands, and when she had finished reading it, said: "Now advise me, Isabella; shall I go with Fanny, or stay with you?"

"Do not go!" she replied, with a grave sweetness. "I want you with me."

There is a degree of happiness which we cannot immediately compass. When for years we have looked forward to one possibility, when all our earthly hopes have centred in one point, one speck so small, that by continuous gazing it has seemed to vanish altogether from our sight, a sudden realisation of our wishes takes us by surprise, and bewilders us. Even when we know that our happiness is secure, we dare not believe in it. Frank's measure of joy seemed too full; he closed his heart to the meaning which he felt was in Isabella's words. He must gradually get accustomed to so much happiness. Its intensity pained him. He looked anxiously at Isabella, but made no answer.

She was uncertain how much he had read in her heart; she dared not be more explicit; one word, and they would have understood each other; but on her part, delicacy forbad it; and fear of misconstruction kept him silent. One thought filled both minds, yet neither dared utter it.

After vainly waiting for an answer, Isabella proceeded: "I want you to assist me in carrying out a plan which I think will be best for all parties—I believe the only safe one." She paused; still Frank remained silent, and she went on: "I wish you to talk to poor Charles, and persuade him to go to Paris as soon as he is able to travel. That will, I think, be best for him, and best for Chloe. Do you not agree with me?"

Frank longed to fall at her feet, and make a full confession of his feelings. Was the expression of her soft eyes, as they met his, really that he so earnestly desired? Did the tremulous intonations of her voice indeed, indicate a feeling to excite which he would gladly have laid down his life? They did; his heart said so plainly, and so did his judgment. But in an affair of such moment,

could he trust the voice of his heart? Even his judgment could not be relied on in a case which involved his all of earthly happiness. He remembered how he had once before been mistaken; another disappointment would be more than he could endure. Such a priceless stake must not be ventured at one throw.

After a short pause, he said, with what calmness he could assume:

"I believe you are right. I believe that it is only in absence that we can judge our friends fairly. When they are moving and acting with us, our passions are excited or our tempers irritated by the continual friction, the incessant wear and tear of every-day life. A character, like a landscape, should be viewed from a height, and from a distance."

"That is indeed true. You know how I once overrated Charles Stanly. Now, perhaps, I underrate him as much. Poor Charles! I would fain, if I could, be just towards him! Poor Charles!" she repeated, with a sigh of pity; but not of that pity which is akin to love.

"Oh, Isabella!" exclaimed Frank, carried away by his enthusiasm, "you could not, if you would, be otherwise than just!"

"Frank! is it you who says so? You, to whom I have been so unjust, so——"

Emotion checked her voice. But, at the end of a few moments, she looked into his face. Gratitude, trust, affection, deep and devoted, were written unmistakably in her mild but expressive features. Frank seized her hand.

Did it return his pressure? He could not tell; he dared not hope that it was so. Even in thought, such happiness could hardly be realised. He was so completely overpowered by the intensity of his feelings, that he let slip the opportunity for which he had waited all his life. He was utterly incapable of pronouncing a word.

Isabella partly saw what was passing in his mind. She remembered that he had once said to her, that real feeling is always silent; and she comprehended the strength of his emotion from his inability to express it.

"Enough for the present," she said, after a short pause. "Another time we will talk

further. Now we must try to be calm, and think of what we have to do, and how it may best be done. I am uneasy about Charles, and very uneasy about my sister. The poor child is struggling against feelings which she does not understand, but which, if we are not careful, will soon overwhelm her. So long as Charles remains here, any attempt to reason with her will be fruitless." She paused, and then added, with a degree of emotion such as she seldom gave way to: "Oh, Frank, and this is all my doing! All this misery is caused by my wilful folly! Oh, Frank, I was worse than weak when I yielded to that fatal delusion. I was worse than weak when I rejected your warning. Weak! oh, I was wicked, for I was ungrateful—ungrateful towards my best and dearest friend. Oh, Frank, can you ever, ever forgive me?"

Before he could answer, she had escaped from the room.

He remained gazing after her for some time; then rousing himself from a delightful reverie, he said, in his own mind: "But my happiness must not make me selfishly un-

mindful of others." Accordingly, he went to inquire after Charles.

He was a great deal better. He was up and dressed. He was evidently much pleased to see Frank; thanked him again and again for his kind attendance; and conversed for a considerable time without any apparent fatigue.

In the evening, Charles appeared so well that Frank thought he might venture to give him Isabella's message. She and Frank had talked over the best way of conveying it to him. She told him what had passed between herself and Charles just before his accident, how Charles had entirely mistaken the cause of the emotion which prevented her from explaining herself, and how Chloe's sudden entrance had alarmed them. They had then agreed that Charles, if possible, should be persuaded to quit Overdale as soon as he was able to leave his room, and without again seeing either herself or Chloe. Both Frank and Isabella judged that his mind would be more at ease when a decision had been taken, and that it would, therefore, expedite his recovery.

Frank, without preamble, introduced the subject to Charles. He spoke with great firmness, and to the point, yet he used gentle language, and spared Charles's feelings as much as possible.

But, in spite of all his caution, Charles would not hear him patiently to an end. He interrupted him incessantly, and became more and more excited every moment.

"This is not using me well?" he exclaimed, with an angry voice and a flashing eye. "Isabella has no right to behave in this way. It is not treating me as I deserve. It is not like her; some one else, perhaps, has prompted her to this. If she can tread duty under foot, I cannot. My principles of honour are stricter. She changes her mind every moment. It is barely twenty-four hours since she agreed to accompany me to Paris. I told her I should not go alone, and I will not. I am ready to keep my word; she shall be held to hers, or—— Yet stay," he added, less violently; "ask her to come herself and speak to me. In a case like the present, the interference of a third person is fatal."

Frank saw that Charles was in that excited

state which cannot brook contradiction. He therefore agreed to what Charles wished; but, anxious to spare both him and Isabella the pain of a distressing scene, he advised Charles to defer the interview till his health was stronger, and he more able to reflect and speak calmly.

But Charles interrupted him with increased violence. "Do *you* recommend delay? You, whose by-word is determination and expedition!" Then he added, more gently, "Forgive me, my friend, if I have said anything unkind to you; bear with me, for I am ill and miserable, and hardly responsible for my words. I shall not be easy till I have spoken to Isabella; go, for God's sake, and tell her to come instantly. I am too wretched, too feverish and irritable to bear suspense, even for a single moment."

Frank was touched by Charles's distress; he saw that what he said was true; he observed his colour deepen, and his eyes flash brighter every moment, and judging that it was best to comply with a sick man's wishes, he went at once to Isabella, and delivered the message.

When Isabella reached the dressing-room,

she found Charles walking up and down, evidently in a state of great excitement.

"Your friend and adviser," he began, in an angry voice, "Frank Tyrrell, has given me what he calls a message from you. But I would fain believe that it was he who originated the idea, and I am surprised to find you so easily influenced."

"You are mistaken. The idea is mine. I begged Frank to convey my views to you. I thought thus to make the intelligence more acceptable. I mean, I thought it best to avoid personal communication upon a painful subject."

"Do you send me away from you? Why do you send me away from you?"

She replied, in a low, clear voice, "Ask your own heart, Charles Stanly!"

He flushed crimson, but would not appear to understand her, and replied, evasively:

"Your conduct is altogether unaccountable. You change from one moment to another. A few hours ago you promised, or as good as promised, to accompany me to Paris; now you are of another mind. There is no relying upon a person so changeable."

"It is not I who am changeable, and you know it."

It was painful to behold Charles's confusion. His physical weakness made him less able to conceal it. He made several ineffectual attempts to speak, but he stammered and hesitated. His last resource was to work himself up into a rage—no difficult task for a man who is angry with himself.

He heaped reproaches upon Isabella; they were absurd and incoherent, but they answered the purpose of confounding his perceptions. After having talked at random for some time, he almost persuaded himself that Isabella was really to blame, and that he was an ill-used victim of her fickleness. He told her that she had ruined him for life; that she had ruined him in the eyes of the world, ruined him in the estimation of his uncle; and that whatever might henceforward be his conduct, she, and she alone, was responsible for it, in the sight of God and in the sight of man.

She let him run on till he had exhausted himself; then, in tones which she vainly endeavoured to render calm, she said:

"Oh, Charles! how little—how very little you have known me!" She burst into tears.

The excessive agitation she betrayed, overcame Charles's anger. He was not prepared for a burst of feeling in one who so seldom yielded to her emotions. His fictitious anger was dispelled; a painful sense of his own unworthiness returned upon him stronger than ever; and he exclaimed, in full sincerity of contrition:

"Oh, Isabella! Isabella! forgive me, though I do not deserve it. You are noble and generous; forgive me, *because* I do not deserve it. Try me—only try me. We two can never part; we have been friends too long."

"We may be friends still; we *must* be friends, but no more; we must part now, but not in anger. Do not let yourself be misguided by a false point of honour, an overstrained principle of duty. A promise broken in spirit is more than broken in fact. Let us understand one another clearly. All is over between us."

"Do not say so!" he vehemently inter-

rupted. "How can you say so, when you recollect what we have been to one another."

"It is those very recollections which compel me to speak as I now do," she began, in a steady tone; but she could say no more, her voice faltered, and it was in broken accents that she added: "You know, as well as I do, that all *must* be over between us. You know why it must be so. This ought to have been made plain long since. It was, perhaps, my fault, for weakly shunning a painful disclosure. We have both been wrong. We must forgive one another. None shall blame *you*. Fear nothing from your uncle. I will take all upon myself."

She held out her hand to him. He wrung it violently. Her generosity unmanned him; he was too much agitated to speak, and stood gazing at her as she glided from the room.

CHAPTER X.

CHARLES remained for some time with his eyes fixed upon the door by which Isabella had vanished. The scene he had just gone through produced a strange effect upon him. It stimulated his overwrought brain to an extraordinary degree; and produced an intoxication like that of opium, filling his imagination with wild, yet delicious phantasies.

Isabella's words, "all is over between us," rung in his ear again and again, now loud, and close at hand; now distant, and soft, as the muffled echo of a bell; but, near or far, the words had in them a mysterious fascination. Like the mountain strain to the exiled Swiss, the melody awoke recollections of the past and hopes for the future. It blended both

together, confounding time and distance. It was fraught with a deep and a blissful meaning. Vision upon vision peopled his brain, bright dreams of past felicity, of future joy.

He threw himself dressed upon the bed, and yielded to the magical charm which held him bound. The bed itself seemed to move, and heave up under him; it rocked him warm, and softly, as an infant's couch.

A flood of recollections rushed in upon him like the wild waves of a troubled sea. But the sun was on the waters, and the little eddies danced and sported in its brilliancy. It seemed a vast ocean of gold and of azure, and Charles was cradled upon its surface. He was wafted high and low by the sportive billows, and the voluptuous undulations lulled him to repose.

His dream carried him back four years. He fancied himself at Eastrow, and that it was the day of the regatta; Charles thought that he stood upon the terrace which overhung the sea. The boat-race was just over, and he felt melancholy, for he had lost it; he gazed dejectedly upon the water, and lo! a small hand

glistened white upon its surface, and he knew that it was Chloe's hand.

In another moment he was in the abyss beneath, and swimming vigorously in its depths. But the cold waves sent the blood boiling to his temples. He had found her, he had saved her, she was in his arms.

Then he bore her to the shore, and he laid her on the turf, and he saw the large eyes open and close again.

He threw himself down beside her, and seized her in his arms. Why did she not respond to his passionate embrace? He pressed her tighter and tighter to his bosom, but she was stiff, and cold, and lifeless.

Was he awake, or dreaming? He could not tell. He strove to rise, but he had no power to move. Chloe lay in his arms heavy and dead. The blood curdled and froze at his heart.

He struggled to shake off this horrible vision, but vainly. It returned again and again. It filled him with superstitious terror. Was it a fearful presage? Was Chloe in reality ill—dying? This might be a mysterious fore-

warning. Perhaps, at that very moment, her soul had passed from her.

He was now quite awake, but he could not dispel the dread which had taken possession of him. He could not resist the impression that some disaster had befallen Chloe. He endeavoured to laugh at his own fears, but the effort was ineffectual. They grew stronger every moment.

He could remain still no longer. He sprung from the bed—all was dark—but he found the door instantly, and threaded the long labyrinth of passages more easily than if it had been broad day.

A ray of light shone from under a doorway—a feeble, straggling ray—but to him it was a bright halo. It had played round her temples, it had caressed her cheek, it had kissed her soft, warm lips, it was imbued with her essence. He fell upon his knees and worshipped it.

He bent down low until his lips touched the ground. He drank eagerly of that air, which was full of her. Intoxication fired his brain; it reeled and reeled again.

So near, and yet so far. Was ever torture more dreadful. Yet worlds could not tear him from that spot. He rioted in that delicious misery.

He listened intently! All was still as death. But gradually his ear caught a soft, measured sound. It was her breathing, calm and regular—how could she sleep so soundly?

At last a low murmur reached his ear. It was *her* voice. She must be speaking in her sleep. No doubt she was dreaming—of what, or of whom?

The tones became gradually more articulate. Then she heaved a gentle sigh. She spoke soft words—the words she had spoken as he lay bleeding on the grass.

Was she dreaming, or had she dreamt? Perhaps, in imagination, she was binding his head with her scarf; or perhaps, in her dream, her lips had touched his.

His blood ran lava. With one strong bound he burst the door and stood by Chloe's bed.

She started up in horror, as if she had seen a spectre. Her long dark hair fell streaming

round her, and shrouded her slender form. Her eyes, preternaturally large, were strained with terror. Her features were fixed and rigid. She was pale as ashes; even her lips were bloodless.

Then, for one short moment, light dawned in her eyes, and joy was in their dark pupils. But it was the glare of a meteor, as beautiful and as transient. It passed, and all was again dark. She moved her hands to warn Charles off, while she gazed at him with a vacant stare, as if she hardly recognised him.

"Chloe! my own Chloe!" he wildly exclaimed, "come, fly with me! Why that fearful look? Why that strange silence? You are mine—it is written in heaven—it is written in your eyes, that we were made for each other. I will not leave you. I will not give you up—nothing shall part us now. I will not live without you. I will follow you to the confines of the earth. I will——"

"Charles Stanly!" spoke a low, clear voice behind him. It was Isabella's voice.

He started as if it had been a call from the dead. He smote his forehead violently; then,

with a gesture of despair, he rushed out of the room.

All next day Chloe kept her bed. The excitement she had gone through brought its reaction. She was subdued morally and physically. She lay in a state of torpor, as the unconscious tears rolled down her cheeks.

But she was not of those whose excitement evaporates, and its cause is forgotten. Her nature was enthusiastic as well as excitable, her reasoning might not be accurate, but her feelings were deep and true. Impulse with her supplied the place of judgment. Not all Isabella's kind and judicious training had been able to correct or even to mitigate this disastrous tendency. Chloe was either entirely passive, or else she acted with a headlong impetuosity, a reckless daring, absolutely terrific.

Hitherto her young life had been one bright holiday. Time had been gay pastime. The hours had flown onwards without care or thought; each brought its amusement fleeting, but sufficient. Enjoyment seemed a thing so natural, as to be an element of being,

a quality essential to it. To Chloe the world seemed a paradise; existence meant happiness.

The first chill was a withering blight. She could not conceive of moderate contentment. She could not wait till the blast had passed over, and then rise saddened but chastened. She could not brook a chequered fate; life to her must be all sunshine or all gloom. She knew only of happiness or misery; she must grasp the former in its fullest sense, or else plunge headlong into the latter.

Lord Overdale's proposal of marriage had first wakened her to the reality of life. She felt that to become his wife was to renounce Charles, and that to renounce Charles was worse than death.

But when she saw him kneeling at Isabella's feet, and Isabella, as it seemed to her, bending fondly over him, the revulsion of her feelings drove her to the verge of madness. A sort of jealous frenzy drove her back to Lord Overdale, and impelled her, by accepting his suit, to separate herself from Charles entirely, and for ever.

The conviction that her deed was irrevocable destroyed her self-control in the ensuing scene with Charles. She felt that she could never be his; the barrier was so insuperable as to remove all necessity for restraint. The state in which she found Charles completed her bewilderment, and words were wrung from her which should never have passed her lips.

Not that she reasoned all these things, or even thought them; but she felt them—felt them with an intensity proportioned to the passionate vehemence of her nature.

She hated herself for what she had done, and panted for the atonement. The more dreadful the sacrifice, the more she longed to make it. She felt as if then only her self-upbraiding would be stilled.

Her loathing of herself increased her affection for her sister. It reached a pitch of the most romantic enthusiasm. That evening, when Isabella came to her room, Chloe raised herself in bed, and stretched out her arms to her.

"Can you forgive those who have sinned against you?" she whispered, anxiously.

"As I hope to be forgiven!"

"Then kiss me, kiss me, sister!" she exclaimed, and passionately threw herself into Isabella's arms. Isabella returned the caress with a sigh of tenderness.

"Thank God," murmured Chloe as to herself. "Thank God, I may kiss her now."

Chloe had heard her sister's sigh, and mistook it for a sigh of longing. She wished to tell Isabella of her engagement to Lord Overdale, thinking that thus the painful feelings with which she supposed her to be contending would be at once dispelled. Chloe made several attempts to speak, but she felt that she was unable to do so with composure, and she feared lest an unguarded look or word might betray the secret of which she believed Isabella was still ignorant—*i. e.* that she returned Charles's affection. It would, she thought, be best that some indifferent person should tell Isabella of her betrothal. When Isabella's first surprise was over, Chloe thought she should be more able to act her part and lull her sister into the belief, that

in marrying Lord Overdale she was only following her own choice. For the present, therefore, she refrained from further conversation, and lay quietly down, as if to sleep.

Next morning, Chloe appeared at breakfast, with a beautiful moss rose in her hand; she presented it to Lord Overdale. She had of late entirely neglected the performance of this pretty ceremony. In her manner was a soft languor, in her movements a shrinking timidity, exquisitely touching, and indescribably graceful.

Lord Overdale attributed this changed demeanour to her excessive modesty; he loved her the better for what in another might seem exaggeration.

He read in her eyes the meaning of her gift, and as he stooped over her he very gently pressed the trembling fingers which fastened the flower in its wonted place.

She stood for a moment with her hands folded upon her bosom, and her eyes cast down. Then she spoke in a low but steady tone:

"Let the rose be a token. All may be told now."

The fire which kindled Lord Overdale's eye at that moment, betrayed feelings so intense, yet so delicate, that even Chloe must have been proud of exciting such, had she read that noble countenance. But her eye was still cast down, and, without even looking at him, she passively let him lead her to the breakfast-table.

He would not, for worlds, have said one word which might offend this exquisite modesty. The breakfast passed without the slightest allusion to what was so soon to be made public. Madame Rodostomus had not yet appeared; Charles, as an invalid, did not come down so early. Lord Overdale addressed himself chiefly to Frank; but it was clear that he conversed only as a matter of form, and that his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

As soon as the meal was over, Lord Overdale rose, and was about to call Frank aside, when the widow pounced into the room, pouring out excuses for being late, with a volubi-

lity which at any other time would have excited Lord Overdale's wrath, but Chloe's mother was now sacred.

He listened with extraordinary patience to a series of parenthetical phrases, intended to explain the cause of her detention. She was a little nervous at first starting; for some time past his manner had been so distant and so gloomy, that her fondly cherished hopes had been seriously discouraged. But his present suavity caused such a violent reaction in the old lady's breast, that she could hardly resist dancing for joy; and when Lord Overdale took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and begged for a few moments' private conversation with her, she could contain her emotions no longer, but bursting into tears, threw herself into his arms.

"It's all joy, it's all joy!" she exclaimed, between her sobs. "Don't think it's anything else; but when I'm glad, I'm always sorry, that is, I appear so. It's my way; it may be absurd, but I really can't help it."

All Lord Overdale's equanimity was not proof against this ridiculous exposure. Much

as he respected the maternal feelings with which he supposed Madame Rodostomus to be actuated, and which he concluded had inspired her with unwonted penetration, he could not stand acting a part in their ludicrous manifestation. So, relinquishing the idea of personally communicating with her, he placed her, not very gently, in a chair, and having whispered a few words in Frank's ear, he left the room.

"I have something to tell you," said Frank to Madame Rodostomus. "Are you composed enough to hear me now?"

"Oh, come to my sitting-room—come to my sitting-room," squabbled the old lady. "I might faint, or scream, or take hysterics, or something. I know what you are going to say; still the unexpected shock will, I'm sure, be too much for me."

She seized Frank's arm, and chattering all the way, dragged him up-stairs.

Chloe followed, but Isabella remained behind. She saw that the old lady was under the same absurd misapprehension with regard to Lord Overdale's feelings towards her,

and she disliked to see her mother expose her folly. That Lord Overdale should have a communication to make, surprised and somewhat alarmed Isabella; but whatever it might be, she knew that Frank would inform her of it.

As soon as the widow reached her apartment, she threw herself into her favourite arm-chair. "Now tell me what you have got to say, though I know it beforehand."

"Lord Overdale has desired me to inform you that your youngest daughter——"

"Is his affianced bride," said Chloe, in a solemn voice.

No pen can do justice to Madame Rodostomus's amazement. For some moments, it actually deprived her of the power of speech. Soon, however, she made up for lost time.

In the midst of a torrent of words concerning Providence, her ill-luck, and her poor, dear departed husbands, the door opened, and Charles Stanly rushed, like a madman, into the room. He forcibly seized Chloe's hand.

"I have just seen my uncle," he said, in tones choked with passion. "He has spoken a word which I will not believe. Chloe! say that it is false!"

"No! for it is quite true!"

"It is false—by Heaven, it *shall* be false." Charles fell at her feet in an agony of despair. "I will not leave you—you are mine, mine, by the decree of Heaven—for you love me. You are mine—for you are life, and light, and joy to me. I will not leave you, I will not lose you. Let us fly far, far away. There are islands in the wide ocean, there are green spots in the waste, where we may live, and love, and be happy!"

Charles's impetuous words raised a fearful storm in Chloe's bosom; but it did not, for a moment, shake her resolution. Summoning all her strength, she spoke with preternatural calm:

"Did you not hear me say that I am the bride of Lord Overdale?"

"I will not hear it. It must not be—— You do not know all——"

"Go!" said Chloe, in a loud, hard voice.

"Leave me! Shall I listen to the man who betrayed my sister!"

"Chloe is my best excuse!"

"Then but for me, you would have loved her still?"

"I should have cherished an illusion, and never known love in its full reality!"

"Enough! I see it all——" Her voice became low and tremulous. The supernatural strength which had hitherto supported her, was fast giving way. She tried to speak again, but her lips quivered, and her voice failed her. She waved her hand, motioning Charles to go; but he remained gazing distractedly at her. At length, turning to Frank, she faltered almost inaudibly:

"I am not able for more—tell him to go—go with him—another time I will speak to him—perhaps to-morrow—but not now—I am weak and ill—I want rest. In pity—in mercy—go."

Charles could not resist her look and tears of meek supplication. Indeed, weakened as he was, from the effects of his accident, he had not his usual command of words, and he felt that, at another time, he should be better

able to urge his suit. He hesitated a moment, and then left the room. Frank followed him.

The door had no sooner closed, than Madame Rodostomus set up a loud scream.

"Was ever such a thing heard of! To be unfaithful before we were married! and to make me a widow, without making me a wife! I shall die of despair! Chloe, my dear, I wish you would pour the contents of that bottle down my throat!"

With these words the widow pointed to a shelf on which stood the case containing her bottle of lotion, which she contemplated, all the time, with a sort of melancholy complacency. Then sitting down, she opened her mouth very wide, as if she really expected that Chloe would obey her request.

"Pour all, or part—just as you please—where's the use of economising it after I am dead? What's the use of lotioning my eyes now? he will never admire them again! Better go blind at once!"

She put her feet on the fender, folded her dress carefully upon her knees, to prevent its

being scorched by the fire, and shut her eyes resolutely.

At the end of a few moments, finding, probably, that keeping her eyes shut was not more entertaining than holding her mouth open, she began to unclose, first one lid, then the other, like a matronly cat before the fire, until, at length, she exclaimed impatiently, "Will you, or will you not, do as I bid you?"

"*Madre mia!*" murmured a soft plaintive voice; "dear, dearest mother!"

"Now don't my dear, don't!" screamed the old lady. "I can't bear it, and I won't. You never speak in that gentle way unless something dreadful has happened, or is going to happen; once when you were a baby and lay dead of the cramp, and once when you were drowned at Eastrow. Now, *do* you hear me telling you to be cross, or perverse, or scold, or swear, if you like it, I don't mind. Only don't be gentle; I can't stand it. Chloe, if you will only be just a little cross, you may have all the Lord Overdales in the world, for aught I care. What are they to me, alive or dead, in comparison with you, my darling!"

As she concluded these pathetic words, the old lady went towards Chloe, who threw herself into her mother's arms.

"After all," said the old lady, "it does not signify which it is—the mother or the daughter—just the same thing, so that one of us is the bride of Lord Overdale!"

Having thus comforted her daughter, the widow went to comfort herself by bathing her eyes. This ceremony required considerable preparation. The bottle had to be carefully uncorked, and the lotion to be cautiously dropped into a saucer. Then, in order to use it properly, it was necessary to maintain a very erect position. All the time these preliminaries were being observed, the old lady kept chattering to herself, and finally succeeded in regaining her usual state of chirupy lamentation.

During her mother's tragi-comic harangue, Chloe had remained sunk in a chair, silent and motionless. When Chloe saw Madame Rodostomus reach the bottle and saucer from the shelf on which they stood, she started and gazed upon her with a strange, scared look. Her eye followed the old lady's movements

with the same unearthly stare. A convulsive shudder passed over her, and she held her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some fearful vision. Then feebly murmuring the words, "The bride of Lord Overdale," she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHOUGH Frank and Charles left Madame Rodostomus's room, as we saw, in company, they did not remain long together. They needed no words to tell each other that they had best separate. They felt instinctively that their minds were not in unison, and though filled with similar thoughts, they knew that confidence or sympathy between them was impossible.

The similarity of their situations showed most strongly the difference of their minds. For each, happiness and misery were in the scales. For each, a crisis was impending. Each felt that the next few hours would bring a turning-point in his life, that the moment was at hand which should fix his future fate. Each felt the necessity of being alone, in order to prepare himself for the coming trial.

Frank went to his room, opened his desk, and took from its secret drawer the miniature upon which we once before saw him gaze so long and so sadly. But the contemplation of that picture was now productive of very different emotions to those former ones. Yet, though the sadness had in a great measure disappeared, there was in his expression and gestures a vague sort of uneasiness, very unlike his usual calm, decided manner. It was clear that he was not yet at peace with himself.

He recalled the day when he had received this portrait as a parting gift from Isabella, a mere child then. It was all she had to give, the thing she most valued on earth, for it had belonged to her father, and therefore she gave it to her friend. Frank was in trouble, and she felt that to prove her affection was the only solace she could offer. But that was long ago; would she do the like now?

His heart and his judgment both answered in the affirmative, and yet he persisted in doubting both. His heart impelled him to Isabella with a full confession of his attachment. His judgment told him that it would

be favourably received. "Why then do I not go at once and speak openly to her?"

He asked himself this question two or three times over.

Was it because his former avowal had been so ill received? No; for since that period circumstances were wholly altered. Then Isabella was under a delusion; a fascination had obscured her reason. Now it had fled for ever. That meeting at Eastrow had dispelled it, and its transient returns had been but vain shadows of a past dream. Frank felt that it was so; why then did he not speak?

He knew that the time was come to which he had so long looked forward. The illusion must one day pass away; he had always known it. He had never doubted but that the feeling which she mistook for love was a mere phantom of the imagination, and that she would sooner or later recognise its falsehood.

The conviction that she should one day be his had always dwelt in his heart. It had never forsaken him, even when it seemed most hopeless. It was strong as the principle of life within him. This conviction had borne him up when all seemed desperate. It had

enabled him to fulfil the most painful of duties, to exert himself in favour of a rival.

And he had been amply rewarded. Isabella appreciated his noble conduct; she had acknowledged her own folly, and acknowledged it freely and fully. Her fault endeared her to him; for he felt, that it is only a mind of the highest order that can thus own and renounce an error.

Why, then, did he not go and speak openly to Isabella? It was a long time before he could answer this question. The opportunity seemed favourable; why did he not at once seize it? Whence this unaccountable irresolution?

At length the solution was found, and he read the riddle of his mind. He was withheld from urging his suit upon Isabella, lest she should mistake the motives which prompted him to do so. Might not a sudden proposal of marriage from him appear the result of compassion for her forlorn condition? Might it not look like taking undue advantage of her situation? Like acting the part of a generous protector? Like an assumption of

superiority? Was it not saying, "See, how much better I am than Charles, whom you preferred to me? See, how much wiser I am than you, for you neglected my warning?" To a man of Frank's character display of any sort was repugnant; but most of all, display of generosity.

It would, therefore, be more agreeable to wait until some casual circumstance should bring on the explanation he so ardently desired. This could not be delayed long. Chloe's position with regard to Lord Overdale must soon be decided. One disclosure must inevitably induce the other.

And meanwhile, was Chloe to be left in this fearful state of suspense? It was clear that she had pledged her word to Lord Overdale, only that she might not stand in her sister's way. It was a foolish, reckless act; yet the motives which prompted it were noble and self-denying. Frank, straightforward and right judging, could not sympathise with the headlong impetuosity which made Chloe thus wantonly condemn herself to years of misery. He could hardly understand, much less admire,

such misdirected generosity. Yet he pitied the mad passion over which she had no control.

Frank felt that he had it in his power to save Chloe, and that delay might urge her to some act still more desperate. He had, the day before, prepared the draft of the marriage settlement, in accordance with Lord Overdale's wishes; it had been sent that morning to the latter, and was now in his hands. No time was, therefore, to be lost. Her plighted word must be recalled soon, if at all. It would also be unjust towards Lord Overdale to have him linger in his illusion. To both the revulsion of feeling would give a powerful shock; and the longer it was delayed, the more painful it would be to endure.

As soon as Frank saw what he ought to do, all his irresolution vanished. "What I mistook for delicacy," he said within himself, "is, after all, but selfishness wearing its disguise. I am not afraid that Isabella will misunderstand me; I am not afraid that she will reject me; but my pride recoils from a sacred disclosure, lest it should remind her of the first one—lest it should recal the words I spoke in

madness, and of which I am ashamed. It would be pleasanter, no doubt, to wait till she gives me still further encouragement; it would be more gratifying, forsooth, to my pride. Yet I know that if she did what I wish, I should not love her so well. Oh, if I was angry with myself then, I have more reason to be angry now. Away with false delicacy, with mean selfishness. I will confess all to Isabella. She shall see me as I am. And she will—I think —I know she will—like me still."

His heart beat high, and his eye beamed with trust and hope, as holding the miniature in his hand, he went to the garden, where at that hour he knew that Isabella was usually to be found.

Charles, meanwhile, had adopted a somewhat different method of arriving at a correct knowledge of his own mind. He began by giving himself up to despair. Chloe was lost to him for ever; he could not, would not live without her. He meditated some direful deed, he knew not what; something which should put an end to his sufferings and to his life. But Chloe's image, more beautiful, more attractive than ever, seemed to hold him back,

and a bright ray shot through the gloomy thoughts to which he had yielded. In Chloe's acceptance of Lord Overdale, he presently discovered something gratifying to his feelings. It proved her deep affection for himself. It was plain that she had engaged her word because she dared not remain free; because she felt that her love for Charles outweighed that for her sister.

How he admired the noble sacrifice she was willing to make! How he gloried in that love, which, itself unchangeable, rejected the possibility of change in Isabella! Chloe's opinion of Charles was clearly such as made her believe that he held all hearts unalterably bound. She thought that Isabella could not give him up and live. She must be undeceived; that fearful sacrifice must be prevented; but how? that was the question.

And, by way of solving it, he allowed his mind to dwell upon the delicious visions suggested by the conviction of Chloe's affection. He let his imagination run riot, and his hopes grew brighter and brighter, until all doubts and sorrows were removed.

Unutterable joy filled his heart. He went

out into the woods to give it full vent. He thought of Chloe, with her beauty and her genius, and her love for him. He thought of her as *his* Chloe, his own, for she loved him; they were made for each other. Hope became certainty, as vision after vision passed through his mind—wavy, undefined, but magically beautiful.

At one moment he fancied himself kneeling with Chloe at Lord Overdale's feet, and pouring out a full confession of their mutual love. It was as if some power from above had inspired their words, and put into their mouths language eloquent, burning, bearing conviction with it. For the old man relented, and his heart was turned, and he looked down upon them with pitiful kindness. He called them his children; he sanctioned their love, and blessed their union.

At another moment, Charles had thrown himself upon Isabella's generosity; he had told her all, and asked her pardon in terms so touching, so persuasive, that she had smiled with her gentle smile, and promised to undertake his cause and plead it for him. And the two sisters went together to Lord Overdale,

and somehow, Charles overheard all they said. Isabella's generosity even exceeded his expectations. She took all the blame upon herself; she contrived entirely to excuse both Charles and her sister in Lord Overdale's sight. She silenced Chloe's interruptions and self-accusations, which, however, still forwarded their cause. Isabella spoke with that mild fervour, that gentle enthusiasm natural to her, and which brought conviction with it. Lord Overdale acknowledged his folly in seeking to make Chloe his wife; he discovered that Charles and she were made for each other, and he took her hand and placed it in his nephew's. The wedding day was fixed, and all was joy and gladness, and congratulations were showered upon them from all sides.

But of all his phantasies, the most delicious was that in which he had carried Chloe far, far away, into some distant happy land. Some bright island in the ocean, or some green spot in the desert, where they might realise the poet's dream of a golden age.

Nothing could be more delightful than this prospect, especially as Charles's desert was, somehow or other, animated by the most de-

lightful society imaginable. Moreover, the wigwam in which it was his lot to dwell was marvellously elegant and commodious, and had an unaccountable resemblance to the English embassy at Paris. His uncle was there, and Isabella, and Lady Ramsay, and Frank, and Madame Rodostomus, all happily united in blissful concord. This delicious reverie engrossed Charles so completely, that he was not roused by the sound of his own name several times repeated.

At last, a hand was upon his arm.

"My dear Charles!" said a soft voice, "what can be the matter with you? Don't you know me?"

"Lady Ramsay!" he exclaimed, with astonishment.

"If we had been strangers, it would not have been surprising your not knowing us," was observed, with profound sagacity.

"Miss Foster, too! My dear Lady Ramsay, I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see you." Charles spoke with great excitement of manner, for he was still bewildered by his rapid journey from fairy-land to reality. "But you take me so completely by surprise,

that even now, I can hardly believe that you are really come!"

"If you had expected us, I dare say you would not have been so astonished to see us," croaked Aurora, confidentially.

"But how well you look?" began Lady Ramsay. "Frank wrote me of your accident, and I set off at a moment's notice to nurse you. Not that I am exactly sorry to find you flourishing, and my journey superfluous," she added, with her old merry laugh.

"Not superfluous! oh, no!" he replied, eagerly. "You could not have come at a more propitious moment. You are the very person I want. My lucky fate sent you hither. I have much to tell you; but to you only," he added, in a whisper.

Lady Ramsay took the hint. "Is this not a kind person," said she, turning towards Aurora, "to leave Eastrow just at this moment, in order to come here with me, and not let me travel alone?"

"Oh dear no!" said Aurora. "I did not like to let you come alone, though I should have liked to have stayed too; but one can't be in two places at once, you know."

"I beg your pardon," said Charles, turning

towards Aurora. "I ought to have congratulated——"

"Oh, not at all," she interrupted him, flushing scarlet as she spoke, and valorously struggling with the portentous joy which oozed, so to speak, out of every pore of her whole person. "I never thought about it, I'm sure; but I'll tell Mr. Smith how good you are."

"*Trève de compliments*," put in Lady Ramsay, "for I want you to do me a favour, my good little Aurora, and just step into the carriage and *dévancer* me at Overdale. Get hold of Frank, and tell him to prepare the way for my reception. Explain why I could not write time enough for my letter to arrive before myself. Frank must make all proper apologies, and smooth down matters before I come."

"Dear!" exclaimed Aurora, frightened to death at the mission, yet proud of being entrusted with it. "I'm so glad to be of use to you; but—yet, after all, I don't so very much mind it, now that I'm going to be married, you know."

Having whispered this conclusive reason to

Lady Ramsay, little Aurora got into the carriage which the ladies had left standing a few yards off, and boldly desired the coachman to drive on.

"Now, Charles!" said Lady Ramsay, "what have you got to tell me?"

He changed colour, but could make no answer. Whereas, formerly, he was fond of talking of his attachment to Isabella, and seized every opportunity which allowed him to dilate upon her beauty, and her talents—now the feeling which possessed him appeared too sacred to be lightly divulged. He could not translate it into ordinary language. He began two or three incoherent sentences, but finished none. Lady Ramsay vainly endeavoured to assist him. At last he exclaimed:

"Oh, Lady Ramsay! that love was a vain dream. My eyes are opened now!"

"Charles!" she said, with a peculiar intonation, as difficult to describe as it would be impossible to analyse the feelings that prompted it—"Charles! do I hear rightly? Can this indeed be true?"

Again Charles hesitated; words failed him; at least he found none which did any justice to the vehemence of his feelings. Then he

said, half speaking to himself: "Oh, there is a twilight which precedes day, and may be mistaken for it, but he who has once basked in the full fervour of noon can never again delight in the cold, grey, cheerless dawn."

A sigh escaped Lady Ramsay, as a flood of recollections crowded into her mind. Her illusions, her hopes, her disappointments, her sorrows, rose up before her; and she thought of her poor dead husband, as of the only being in whom she had never been deceived, and who alone had loved her constantly and entirely.

"Go on, Charles," she said, very softly. "There is more behind; I see it in the face I know so well."

"Chloe Rodostomus!" he murmured, almost inaudibly.

But the low sound made Lady Ramsay start. "*Her* sister!" she screamed aloud. "Impossible! Oh, poor Isabella!"

"Yes, *her* sister." Charles still spoke in a low voice, but it was firm and clear. "And were she ten times her sister, and each sisterhood multiplied again ten times, it would not change me now, for I love Chloe as woman was never loved before."

A pause ensued. Lady Ramsay was mute with astonishment. Charles tried to collect himself, in order to make in full his painful yet pleasurable confession. But he soon found that it was vain to attempt any coherence either of language or of form. He poured out his tale of love as he used to pour out his childish griefs, and he was listened to with the same willing indulgence.

He told of his first meeting with Chloe in her gipsey costume, and her prophetic character. He told how he had struggled against the inroads of an unhallowed attachment—how he would have kept his word to Isabella, had she not herself freed him from it; he dwelt upon her indulgence, her generosity. Then, lastly, he told how Chloe's love had been wrung from her by the sight of his pain and of his danger; and how, in her exalted spirit of self-sacrifice, she had promised to become Lord Overdale's wife, that she might not stand in the way of what she conceived to be her sister's happiness.

Lady Ramsay was charmed with this last trait. It called tears to her eyes, and at once determined all her sympathies in Chloe's favour. Indeed, Chloe had always been a

favourite with Lady Ramsay, whereas it has been seen how little cordiality had existed between that lady and Isabella. She expressed herself ready to do all in her power to serve Charles; but how this might best be done seemed, as yet, doubtful. Still she said that she felt sure of ultimately succeeding. "I sometimes, from laziness, fail in an easy undertaking, but never in one that is difficult; and this business is complicated enough to satisfy even my rapacity for unravelling intricacies."

"I believe you can accomplish anything you please," said Charles, enthusiastically.

"Let us believe it, Charles, and we shall not fail." She mused for a few moments, and then exclaimed: "I have it! I have it! Lord Overdale shall himself give up Chloe!"

"Lord Overdale! but he is madly in love with her."

"*A plus forte raison.* A cold-blooded man is impracticable, but if you once find out the besetting weakness, the game is won. Praise is thrown away upon virtue; but flatter a man's vices, and you may turn him which way you will. Flattery, and flattery, and

flattery — of course skilfully administered. Plenty of cant about honour, and generosity, and abnegation, and *dévonement*, and all these fine things of which the French talk so well, but are too wise to perform any better than we, their less demonstrative neighbours. I must persuade Lord Overdale to give up Chloe, not because he would be miserable with a woman who hates him—oh dear no, *au contraire*—but because it would be so grand and so magnanimous to sacrifice his own happiness to that of a fellow-creature. He must rise superior to humanity in general, and to himself in particular. He must join two loving hearts, and rejoice in his own misery as promoting a happiness which his hand has bestowed. In short," she added, laughing, "if, with an air of profound wisdom, I talk abundance of nonsense, and appear devoutly impressed with the truth of my own lies, I may safely bid defiance to all the Lords of Overdale, past, present, and to come."

Charles was transported, his spirits rose every instant. Still one doubt haunted his mind. Lord Overdale might be convinced of the truth, but Chloe!—would she ever be

made to believe that Isabella was really changed for the man whom she herself loved so blindly?

Lady Ramsay smiled her arch smile.

"I think I can manage that too. There was something in my brother's last letter which——but time enough, I don't care to explain all my tactics. I am too experienced a diplomatist."

Nor did Charles care to hear them. He was afraid lest they should damp the joy which had taken possession of him. On their way home he related an infinite variety of anecdotes of which Chloe was the heroine, and which, it must be confessed, did more credit to the brilliancy of his imagination, than to the accuracy of his memory.

As they reached the house, little Aurora bolted forward to meet them with the important information, "Here I am, and here you are at last."

Lady Ramsay inquired if she had seen her brother.

"No, for he is not at home; so as I could not see him, you know, I did not give him your message."

Lady Ramsay next addressed herself to Mr.

Jones, who, evidently much put out at these unceremonious proceedings, was standing on the steps with an air of ruffled resignation. But she inquired for Lord Overdale with a tone so silvery, and with a smile so captivating, as to make the terrified Aurora stand aghast at her self-possession.

Even Mr. Jones was not proof against the insinuating charm of her manner. Moreover, though his lordship in a general way hated the disturbance of visitors, and indeed rarely admitted any, still his lordship's humour had been so unwontedly suave within the last four-and-twenty hours, that he thought he might venture to announce so amiable a lady.

Lady Ramsay beckoned to Aurora, but the latter, in great trepidation, begged to be spared the shock of the first interview. "I am not quite sure that he likes me particularly," she said; and then added, confidentially, "I think he likes some people better than others; there is no reason why he should not, you know."

Aurora remained behind with Charles, while Lady Ramsay entered the house, preceded by Mr. Jones.

CHAPTER XII.

Lady Ramsay's courage sank a little as she followed the obsequious Mr. Jones through hall, and gallery, and corridor. There was something in that gentleman's stealthy tread which filled her with an unpleasant sort of chilly sensation. When he tapped at the door of Lord Overdale's study, she could not help starting, and her heart was beating very fast indeed.

The "Come in" was, however, pronounced in a tone of voice unusually cheerful; and Lord Overdale's surprise at her unexpected appearance seemed not unmixed with pleasure.

Profuse and diffuse were Lady Ramsay's apologetic expressions for thus taking him unawares; soft and silvery were her voice and smile. Lord Overdale endured her pretty looks and sweet speeches with remarkable

forbearance; indeed, he responded to them with something like cordiality.

Lady Ramsay's self-confidence returned to such a degree, that she was able to assume an air of most captivating *embarras*, as she said, with charming timidity:

"I know that I ought to ask pardon and indulgence for what I am about to say—yet I will do neither; for though with most people it would be politic, it is otherwise with you. I am addressing one who is insensible to flattery, and who was never deceived by artifice; truth is, therefore, in this instance, the best diplomacy. I am much too anxious in my cause to neglect anything that may forward it. I will, therefore, tell you at once, that I have come on purpose to offer advice which I know will be unwelcome, and to solicit a favour that I fear you will refuse."

Lady Ramsay paused to watch the expression of Lord Overdale's face. She perceived that her flattery had, for once, not been displeasing to him, and her courage rose with this conviction. She had gained an advan-

tage over the cautious diplomatist, and she followed it up by a bold stroke. "I have come to plead in favour of your nephew."

Lord Overdale's brow clouded. Any allusion to Charles Stanly roused bitter recollections and angry feelings in his breast.

"Pardon me, Lord Overdale," she proceeded, without seeming to notice the ominous portent—"pardon me if I am over partial to the boy whom I have known from infancy, whom I have always looked upon as a son. I brought him up, and educated him; his happiness is dearer to me than my own. I fear that I have loved him too well to love him wisely. I feel that I cannot judge his faults fairly; but you will, I am sure, make allowance for the partiality, the blindness of a mother."

As she finished speaking, her voice trembled, and a tear stood in her eye. Lord Overdale saw that it was a tear of genuine affection, and his stern countenance somewhat relaxed

"Do not, for a moment, think that I overlook his faults. Poor Charles! I believe I see them even more clearly than another, for they distress me more; I would so fain have

him all perfection! besides, I am conscious that it is I who am entirely to blame for them."

She stopped, as if for encouragement to proceed. Lord Overdale remained silent and impassive.

"I spoilt him when he was a child, I indulged him foolishly when he was a man. My pleasure was to forestal his wishes, to gratify his whims; oh, I am responsible for his faults, but his virtues are all his own."

"Virtues! I was not aware that he was possessed of any. I thank you for the valuable information."

"Oh, Lord Overdale! do not speak so unkindly. You would not speak so, if you knew the torture your words inflict. Your praise is more valuable, your censure more fatal, than that of any other man living; and I feel that Charles has deserved your censure—I feel it painfully, for it is my doing. I am responsible for his faults; reproach me if you will, but pray, pray forgive poor Charles."

"Where there is no offence there can be no forgiveness." Lord Overdale spoke in his haughtiest manner.

"Indeed he is generous, and has the kindest of hearts. He has always been a favourite with his friends. You could not but like him if you knew him better. He is clever, brave, high-spirited, noble-minded—"

Something in Lord Overdale's countenance made Lady Ramsay pause. After a moment's silence, he said, with a sarcastic smile:

"Have you finished your catalogue of virtues? If so, I must beg you to come to the point. I have a foolish prejudice against preambles."

"If ever courage was required, I need it now. I am about to plead a hopeless cause before an inflexible judge. What folly to tell this! but I cannot dissemble."

"Proceed!" vehemently burst from him.

"Charles Stanly no longer loves Isabella Romayne." This time it was no fictitious timidity that caused Lady Ramsay's voice to tremble.

His answer was a smile of bitterest derision. At the expiration of a few moments he slowly spoke. "Why do you hesitate? You have more to tell."

She turned away her head as she whispered the words, "He loves another."

"Did you really suppose me ignorant of that fact?" The intonation of his voice told the sinister expression of his eye. Lady Ramsay dared not meet it.

There was an ominous silence. Lady Ramsay felt her courage giving way; but determined not to leave any chance unattempted, she threw herself impetuously at Lord Overdale's feet. "One word—but one word more. Charles is ready to fulfil his engagement. Indeed he is. He holds himself bound in honour to marry Miss Romayne, though she herself has freed him from his promise. Her sister——"

He loudly and sternly interrupted her, "Is the bride of Lord Overdale."

"No, no. You would not say so, if you knew all." Despair lent her strength to pronounce these words with thrilling energy.

He replied in the same stern voice: "Permit me to be the best judge of what concerns myself."

"Not entirely. Chloe is no less concerned

than you are." As she spoke, Lady Ramsay rose from her knees, and standing before Lord Overdale, she said, impressively: "Lord Overdale, you are known to the world as a just and an upright man; I believe that you are more. I believe these qualities to proceed not from a mere vulgar sense of duty, but from that noble spirit of chivalry so rarely met with in our modern days. Many men are just according to the letter, but few are so in a higher and nobler sense. Few are merciful and self-denying. I believe you to be one of these few, and therefore I venture to make the following disclosure. Chloe accepted your suit —do you know why? Not to injure her sister. Now do you understand me?"

Lord Overdale's countenance, hitherto unmoved, presented a striking change. He turned cadaverously pale; a bluish hue overspread his features. It lasted but for one moment; in another he was again himself. The cloud had passed so rapidly, that Lady Ramsay, who had watched his face with terror, doubted whether she had seen rightly. She went on speaking, in imploring accents: "You will not let a girl—a mere child—

surpass you in generosity; and to what end? Could the woman make you happy who loves another?"

Lord Overdale slightly started, but an instant afterwards he said, with extraordinary calmness, "Proceed. Why do you pause?"

"The secret of her love was wrung from Chloe in a moment of anguish. She accidentally found Charles lying stretched upon the grass, bleeding—dying, as she thought. Her heart ran over; words escaped her—words which can never be recalled."

"From whom did you learn this touching episode?" He spoke with his cold sneer, but through it a certain agitation was perceptible.

"I was told by Charles himself. He——"

"Such testimony cannot, of course, be doubted." As he said these words, Lord Overdale rose from his seat, and by a haughty wave of the hand plainly indicated his wish to be alone. Lady Ramsay would not understand the gesture; she went on with increasing eagerness:

"It was dreadful, heartrending, to witness Charles's despair. Oh, you must have pitied

him if you had heard his self-upbraidings! The recollection makes me shudder. I tremble lest he should commit some fearful deed—lest he should lay violent hands upon himself. In his present excited state he is capable of self-destruction."

"Tranquillise yourself. Your alarm is as groundless as your compassion is ill bestowed." He looked significantly towards the door.

"Oh, Lord Overdale, you do not know poor Charles. You do not know his impetuous nature, as I do. Once, as a child, he attempted suicide for some trifle I refused him. Consider the awful responsibility you are incurring. Remember that the happiness of two human beings is in your hands. With one word you may bless or blight them for ever. Oh, say that word, and prove yourself what I have always thought you—the most noble, the most generous, the most self-denying——"

"Enough!" he said, in tones loud, deep, and vibrating. "Enough, and more than enough. I will not question either the justice of your sentiments, or the soundness of your views; but, unhappily, it has been my prac-

tice through life to act upon my own decision, and to rely upon my own judgment."

Once more he bowed dismissal, and this time so plainly as not to be misunderstood. Lady Ramsay was obliged to beat a not very dignified retreat.

No sooner was the door closed than a muffled growl, like that of an infuriated lion, burst from Lord Overdale. The features, which in Lady Ramsay's presence seemed cast in iron, were now convulsed with passion. He fell forwards with his face upon the table.

He remained thus for some moments. When he looked up, all trace of agitation had vanished. He seemed but a little paler, a little calmer than usual.

He left the room with his usual heavy, measured tread; and, coming up to Lady Ramsay in the corridor, directed her respecting her way, which she appeared to have lost. Then, with a stately bow, and a lofty apology for not himself accompanying her to her apartment, he passed on to Madame Rodostomus's sitting-room, where he had been told that he should find Chloe.

She was alone. Her mother, having heard of Aurora's arrival, had gone in search of the latter.

Close to the fire was the arm-chair in which the old lady had been sitting. Beside it was a table, on which stood her phial of eye-lotion. But Lord Overdale little heeded these characteristic reminiscences.

He saw nothing but Chloe. She was sitting at a distant window, passive and subdued. She did not move at Lord Overdale's entrance; she did not appear to notice it. Life and youth seemed to have passed from her. She was as one weary and heavy laden, and who longs for rest. The days were come when there is no pleasure in them.

How different from the gay Chloe of former times! Lord Overdale paused as he marked the striking change; extraordinary emotions filled his heart, and as he approached her, his step was unsteady, almost tottering.

"Your happiness is dear to me"—his voice trembled as he spoke—"very dear. You know it. I have given you my affection. In return, I expect confidence and truth."

Then followed a short silence. Chloe seemed

struggling to collect her thoughts. She passed her hand several times across her forehead, as if to arrest some fleeting recollection. Lord Overdale watched her in deep silence, until he saw her brow lighten, her eye clear, and intelligence gradually return upon her countenance. Then, sitting down beside her, he said, solemnly, but with great gentleness:

"I have heard a report which none but yourself can confirm or dispel. You will understand what I mean, when I ask you what were the motives which prompted you to act as you did yesterday. Why did you refuse, then unsolicited, accept my offered hand?"

Chloe bent slightly forward. As if to give sanctity to her expressions, she crossed her hands upon her bosom. "My sister," she faintly murmured.

He uttered no sound; but upon his countenance was a look of anguish so intense as to baffle description.

Chloe, heedless of his agitation, went on in the same monotonous tone: "Forgive me. I never sought to deceive you; what I said, I meant—so help me, God."

"I would fain understand further. I

would fain know the motives which prompted the sudden change. First you rejected my suit——"

Chloe rose suddenly. A strange light beamed in her countenance, as, erect before him, she met his eye steadily, and spoke in a clear, thrilling tone: "Because I loved your nephew." Then she added, almost inaudibly, "I returned when I was assured that he loved *her*." She sank down powerless, as if crushed under a heavy weight.

Lord Overdale gazed at her for one brief moment. Then turning away, he waved his hand in token of a solemn adieu. "For ever!" He spoke thick and indistinctly; his tongue clove to his mouth. "Yes, for ever!" He gave one rapid look at Chloe, and left the room.

Lady Ramsay's interview with Lord Overdale had been far less successful than she expected. She thought to take him by what she called a *coup de main;* she thought to put him off his guard by adroit flattery, and thus to get everything her own way. Though she could not but acknowledge that the result had fallen very short of her hopes, yet she would

not own herself beaten. So long as there remained the remotest chance of success, she was determined not to give in. But how to proceed was a difficult question.

She could not remain quiet. Her natural love of activity had, since Sir James's death, become continuous restlessness. To be always busy was her only palliative against the feelings of remorse which would make themselves felt in her breast. An uneasy sensation of self-dissatisfaction kept eternally goading her forward. She did not, perhaps could not, reason these things out quietly; she only knew that she must incessantly be doing. She did not listen to the inward voice, which told her to make atonement for past follies; but she yielded to the impulsive promptings, that allowed her no rest.

She longed to make her boy happy. She longed to prove to him, and still more to satisfy her own conscience, that her affection for Charles had never exceeded that of a tender parent. She tried to believe that her present eagerness to forward his happiness, by promoting his marriage with Chloe, was sufficient

guarantee that her feelings had always been purely maternal.

After pondering and hesitating for some time, Lady Ramsay determined to consult her brother; or at all events, to have some conversation with him, before deciding upon her next move. Something in the last letter he had written her, had awakened latent hopes in her mind, and the first glance at his countenance called them into activity.

She met Frank returning from his walk with Isabella. A meaning smile beamed upon Lady Ramsay's face when she saw these two together; and when Isabella glided past her, after tenderly pressing her hand, Lady Ramsay could no longer contain an exclamation of joy.

"I see it all! I saw it in her face; I see it even more plainly in yours. Your cheeks are sad tell-tales, Frank. My own dear brother, may you be as happy as you deserve!"

Whether at another moment Lady Ramsay's discovery would have afforded her equal pleasure, is uncertain. Now, it filled her with pure joy. Frank was touched by

her genuine expressions of affection. "My good, kind Fanny!" was all that he could say.

He presently mastered his emotion, and told his story unreservedly. He related much of what had occurred since his arrival at Overdale; how he had gradually been admitted into Isabella's confidence, and thus read her thoughts. He told his sister with what devoted attachment he had loved Isabella ever since his earliest boyhood; what agony he had endured while she was engaged to Charles Stanly; and how intense was his happiness now that he had ascertained beyond doubt, what indeed he always hoped, that the feeling which she had mistaken for love, was but an illusion of the imagination, and fled for ever. He concluded by relating part of a conversation which he had just had with Isabella, and in which they had come to a clear and full understanding.

Lady Ramsay was naturally a little piqued at having been allowed to remain so long in ignorance of the state of her brother's affections. She could not but feel provoked at not having had a hand in the direction and

management of so delicate an affair. Fortunately, however, she recollected the shrewd inferences she had drawn from an obscure passage in Frank's letter. It was plain, from his astonishment at her interpretation of it, that he had not intended to reveal what she so cunningly guessed. This undoubted proof of her sagacity somewhat lessened her mortification; but all her diplomatic disappointments at once vanished, when she reflected upon the generosity which Frank had shown towards his rival. This magnanimity roused her enthusiasm to such a pitch, that she forgot her old grudge against Isabella. She forgot that she had ever called her cold and insensible; she loved her for loving her brother, and congratulated him upon his fortunate choice.

They talked long and confidentially; first of themselves, then of Charles and Chloe. Frank told his sister how uneasy both he and Isabella had been for some time at Chloe's distressing state. Lady Ramsay would hardly listen to his fears. She thought that Isabella's engagement to Frank must at once remove all danger and all difficulty. No time

ought to be lost in communicating it to Chloe.

But Frank recommended caution. He feared that too sudden a disclosure might cause a dangerous, perhaps a fatal revulsion of feeling in one of so excitable a temperament. "Unexpected joy," he said, "gives a shock more violent than that produced by unexpected grief."

Lady Ramsay could not understand this assertion; she judged of Chloe from herself. A moment afterwards, a servant came with a message from Lord Overdale to Frank, announcing that the former had left Overdale upon business so urgent, as not to admit of a moment's delay. Lady Ramsay triumphed; she would not listen to any further doubts.

Frank now consented to her visiting Chloe. He recollected how fond she had always been of Lady Ramsay. Besides, Lord Overdale's departure removed one immediate cause for alarm. There was no longer any danger of interference on his part.

Lady Ramsay's spirits were at their highest pitch, and her courage rose with the difficulty

of the undertaking. On her way to Chloe, she reviewed and dismissed a hundred more or less intricate modes by which the hoped-for issue might be brought about. She had no idea of plain sailing; she loved to disentangle a complicated knot. At length she hit upon the idea of taking Chloe with her to Rome, to which place Charles, and Lord Overdale too, if it so pleased him, might follow. Rome should be the theatre of an exciting drama in the true Spanish style, and after the most approved cloak and sword fashion. What an admirable plot might be worked up! There was a beautiful heroine; there was an old and hated persecutor, together with a young and adored lover; what a complicated intrigue! what trying situations! what effective *coups de théâtre!* what a splendid *dénouement!* and herself the *Deus ex machinâ* of the whole! Scene after scene rose up before her mind's eye. Nothing could be more promising.

Such were Lady Ramsay's feelings when she entered the sitting-room; but a glance at Chloe showed her that Frank was right. He need not have enforced caution. The change in the poor child's appearance shocked and

terrified Lady Ramsay to such a degree, that she was for some time quite unable to command her voice.

Presently, however, she gained more confidence; and with gentle, cautious words she began telling Chloe of her intention of going to Italy, and spending the ensuing winter at Rome.

Chloe listened at first without seeming to comprehend what Lady Ramsay said; but at the sound "Italy" she looked up, and her features gradually brightened. The strained and fixed expression they had worn, changed by degrees into one of eager thought. When Lady Ramsay spoke of fixing for the winter at Rome, Chloe suddenly rose, and with a touch of her old impetuosity she threw herself into Lady Ramsay's arms. "Take me to Rome—oh, take me, take me with you!" she repeated, passionately.

Lady Ramsay was transported. She embraced her again and again. She said that what she most wished was to have Chloe with her. "All will go well," she assured her. "All will go well when we get to Italy; and

you shall be my daughter, my own bright, happy little Chloe."

But Chloe shook her head mournfully. "No, no," she said; "never, never. The dream is over; the hope is past—*that* Chloe is gone for ever." She spoke the last words as if to herself; then, looking in Lady Ramsay's face with an expression of unutterable sadness, she said, in a hard, hollow voice: "Do you not know? Have you not heard it? I am the bride of Lord Overdale."

"Not yet, my darling," Lady Ramsay replied, very gently. She longed to say more, but there was in Chloe's eye a strange and preternatural expression, which absolutely terrified her.

She resumed, after a short pause: "Listen to me, my child. Supposing that Charles Stanly——"

"Oh, hush, hush, hush." Chloe pressed her hands to her ears, as if to shut out the sound she dared not hear.

"But your sister——" Lady Ramsay spoke in short sentences, carefully watching the impression which each word produced—"Isa-

bella—if she should have changed her mind—if she no longer cared for——"

"Impossible!" interrupted Chloe, with wild vehemence. "Do not seek to deceive me. It cannot be. I know it. Isabella cannot change—change is not in her." Then she added in a whisper: "To change for *him!* —no longer to care for *him!*—oh, impossible! impossible!"

As she finished speaking, a faint smile gleamed upon her features and died away. It was a smile of exquisite anguish, revealing a world of suffering and of sorrow.

Lady Ramsay was at a loss how to proceed. Sanguine though she was, she could not shake off a sort of superstitious and indefinable dread which had taken possession of her. She folded Chloe affectionately in her arms, but without being able to speak more.

Suddenly Chloe fell at her feet. Still holding Lady Ramsay's hands, and kissing them passionately, she exclaimed, in broken accents: "Oh, do not hate me, and I will tell you all. Do not hate me if I tell you that but for me he would have loved her still; he said so—he did—he did; indeed the fault was mine. I

was the fiend who separated them. I acted in recklessness, in folly, not knowing what I did. But it was I who sought to attract him; I strove to win him. He avoided me, and I pursued him; indeed, indeed, he is blameless. Tell Isabella so—I cannot. Tell Isabella that he has done no wrong; but ask her not to hate me, for I had not a thought of evil. Do not tell her how wicked I am; but tell her, oh tell her how good he is."

As Chloe spoke these words with touching earnestness, Lady Ramsay's heart melted; her tears fell faster and faster. Self-condemnation ensures sympathy; besides, something more than sympathy was roused in Lady Ramsay's bosom, for conscience told unpleasant truths. But she was not of that numerous class who are severe in proportion as they are guilty. She embraced Chloe tenderly, while she whispered in her ear soothing words of consolation. "Trust to me, my Chloe; come with me. We shall be happy in Italy; you shall see that all will yet be well!"

Again the word "Italy" wrought its powerful charm. Again hope dawned in Chloe's mind. Lady Ramsay saw the favourable im-

pression she had produced, and went on talking in glowing terms of the delights that awaited them there. She exerted to the utmost her powers of persuasion; and with even more than her usual fluency of language and poetry of description, she drew a bright picture of a happy future. She spoke with that self-reliance which inspires confidence and trust; but still she spoke vaguely, for she saw that Chloe's mind was hardly yet prepared to receive the whole truth. She only ventured to throw out some hints, which might, she hoped, presently shape themselves into meaning. There could, however, be no doubt but that Lady Ramsay had succeeded wonderfully in tranquillising Chloe. A calm dreamy hopefulness was on her countenance when Lady Ramsay left the room, to return to her brother with a lightened heart.

Frank and Isabella were together, anxiously expecting her. Lady Ramsay told them a great part of the conversation with Chloe. She owned that she had been at first alarmed at the strangeness of her appearance; but affirmed that she had left her a different being to what she found her. She boasted a little of her own dexterous management, and dilated a

good deal upon the judicious suggestions by which she had prepared Chloe for what was to follow. But she thought that Isabella must herself make the final disclosure; Chloe might not believe it from the lips of another. At all events, Lady Ramsay insisted that she ought not to be kept any longer in suspense, and that Isabella should immediately communicate what was to make them all happy. Lady Ramsay, meanwhile, undertook to seek Charles, and tell him what had passed, that he might be in readiness to fly to Chloe on Isabella's return.

Isabella was of Lady Ramsay's opinion. She thanked her for the tender solicitude she had shown towards her sister, and spoke in terms so affectionate, that Lady Ramsay could contain herself no longer. She embraced her, called her her dearest Isabella, her dearest sister; and in the excess of her joyful excitement poured out an infinitude of reproaches against herself. She told Isabella how unjust she had been towards her, and how she had mistaken her gentle composure for cold insensibility. She would have told much more, had not Isabella stopped these confessions by

a kiss of sincere affection, saying that she must hasten to Chloe.

Again Frank recommended caution. He could not conquer his dread of the fatal effect which too sudden a reaction might produce upon her. Lady Ramsay laughed at his fears, and repeated her satisfactory account of Chloe's state. Isabella united her arguments to Lady Ramsay's. He yielded at last, though with a reluctance for which, as he confessed, he could assign no reasonable cause.

Lady Ramsay had not overrated the salutary influence she had exercised over Chloe. Lord Overdale's visit had left her cast down and despondent. She was crushed by the weight of a burden which she was unequal to bear. Marriage with him seemed worse than death. Under such circumstances, life seemed but a long agony, a protracted martyrdom. Again the desire to die, which once before had crossed her mind, presented itself, though still vaguely. She felt that she could dare, but not endure; what was the pang of a moment to the misery of a lifetime? She had no right to live; she was a guilty thing, obnoxious to her sister, worthless to her friends. That she stood between Isabella and

happiness she never doubted; feeling for Charles as she did, could she, for a moment, doubt it? Had she not been, all would have been well—he had told her so. The spirit of self-sacrifice, which is the soul of all religion, especially of all woman's religion, prompted her to offer herself as an atonement. She must die for her sister.

Lady Ramsay found her in this unnatural state of self-exaltation. She could neither heed nor hear the kind and soothing expressions addressed to her; it was not till the word "Italy" was pronounced, that consciousness was awakened, and with it, hope revived. Nature and youth asserted their rights. Beyond the dark present she beheld the dawning of a fairer future. The young especially, resist and recoil from grief. Time is everything to them, for hope soon ripens into certainty. Chloe's intense love of life returned, and she clung to it the more eagerly from having but now renounced it; time must surely bring a solace, if not a remedy. In time, Lord Overdale's heart would be turned, and he would give her up. Time would chasten and subdue her own rebellious feelings; thus her young life would not injure Isabella, and

she might offer a sacrifice without being a martyr. Future ills are easy to bear; we only succumb to those present.

As Lady Ramsay pictured Italy with its beauty and its glory, Chloe's imagination far outstepped the glowing description; she recollected the bright days of her happy childhood, and she felt as if they might be again renewed. Scene after scene rose up in her mind, each more glowing than the former; the Vatican, with its miracles of art; the dreamy Campagna, steeped in its vapour of azure and of gold. Chloe yielded to these visions of harmony and of beauty. As she mused, Charles Stanly's form hovered in the distance, as if long years had gone by, and his affection had become calm and holy as her own. And Isabella's arms were about her, and she blessed little Chloe as of old. And Chloe felt more than happy, for she was reconciled to herself; and she was filled with hope, and trust, and love.

Isabella came in. A rich glow was on Chloe's cheek, and her eyes beamed with indescribable rapture as she rose to meet her sister. She embraced her with a calm and touching affection. Isabella was no less surprised than delighted at her sister's look of holy joy, and

she concluded that Lady Ramsay's suggestions had caused Chloe already to guess what she had come to tell. Before Isabella was able to put her story into words, Chloe had begun talking enthusiastically, but collectedly, of her projected journey to Italy with Lady Ramsay; she reminded Isabella of the happy days that they had spent together in that fair country, and recalled various anecdotes of her childhood in which Isabella's affectionate words, and gentle admonitions, had checked Chloe's rash impetuosity.

Then she drew Isabella to the window, and made her sit down by her.

"Look, Isabella!" she said, with a sweet and almost a cheerful smile—"look at the little swallows, gathering and sweeping in circles, and preparing for departure. Yesterday it made me sad to see them, but I can rejoice with them to-day, for Chloe, too, shall soon migrate to a warmer and more sunny clime. The only thing that vexes me," she added, after a moment's pause, "is the parting from you, dearest. But we shall soon meet again, sister; and, meanwhile—you will love poor Chloe?"

"There is no need to part, my darling." And she whispered the happy secret.

Chloe's agitation was excessive. She trembled from head to foot. A strange kind of terror glared in her eyes; she stared wildly before her, as if terrified by some horrible spectre. Isabella's soothing words seemed only to increase the dread which had taken possession of her. Isabella thought it would be best to leave her quiet for a time, that she might give way unobserved to the excess of her emotions.

"I will return presently," Isabella whispered, "and bring somebody with me, whom you will be glad to see."

Chloe's answer was a convulsive sob, and a passionate embrace.

There was something unnatural in this sudden return of excessive vehemence; and though Isabella was aware of the fitful impetuosity of her sister's feelings, her voice and manner, as she gave her report to Lady Ramsay, betrayed extraordinary uneasiness.

It alarmed Frank, but Lady Ramsay would see nothing to fear; on the contrary, she insisted that the violence of the first burst was a favourable sign, and that the sight of Charles was alone needed to convert Chloe's agitation into joy.

Indeed, had it been otherwise, Charles's eagerness could not have been restrained. He had expected Isabella's return with ungovernable eagerness, and he now flew to Chloe, never doubting but that one word from him would heal all her anxieties and all her sorrows.

Lady Ramsay followed slowly. Isabella went to her mother, to tell her of what had taken place.

Charles rushed up-stairs, and opened the door abruptly. A strange perfume mounted to his brain, bewildering his senses. He darted forwards; an empty phial rolled to his feet. "Chloe, my own Chloe!" he wildly exclaimed, "will you not speak—not look at me?"

But she remained silent and still. She sat in her mother's chair; her elbow rested upon the table, and her head was supported upon her small white hand. Her eyes were cast down, the dark lashes shrouded her pale cheek; but the full red lips still retained, as in sad mockery, the hue and bloom of health. A pen was in her hand, but it did not move along the sheet upon which she had been writing. Paper lay on the table before her.

A piercing shriek from Lady Ramsay roused Charles to a sense of what had happened.

"Oh, no, no, no!" he screamed aloud. "Do not say it—it cannot be—she must not, shall not die!"

Frank appeared with a sealed letter in his hand. He stopped, appalled at the fearful scene before him. Then his eye fell upon the open paper. It bore the following words:

"To my Sister,—

"You shall not sacrifice yourself for me. Chloe is a useless thing, unfit to live. She shall not mar your happiness; but think kindly of her when she is no——"

The sentence was unfinished—death had intervened, and stayed her hand for ever.

Frank took the paper, that he might, for a time, conceal from Isabella its painful contents. The letter he held was addressed to Charles; it had been left for him by his uncle. Charles tore it open; it fell upon the ground. It was as follows:

"I renounce all claim to the hand of Chloe Rodostomus. I give my full consent to your marriage with her. May she be happy!

"Overdale."

CONCLUSION.

Lord Overdale did not return home for many months. It was supposed that he travelled over the Himalayas, and visited other wild parts of Asia, but nothing certain transpired respecting his movements. A mystery hung over all his proceedings. When he returned to Overdale, his behaviour was stranger and more unsociable than ever. None knew in what manner he spent his time.

Lady Ramsay went immediately to Rome, where she found many opportunities of disposing of her superabundant energies. She soon got acquainted with several of the cardinals, who paid zealous devotion to the rich English lady. Rumour was not slow in signalising one of them as having dared to offer

more than spiritual homage at her shrine. In order to rebuke his presumption or to save his soul, she attempted his conversion. Her success was at first so great, that she conceived the intrepid design of redeeming the whole conclave from the fatal errors of Popery. Unhappily, however, instead of converting, she became converted; and, after a long controversy, she embraced that one true and universal faith professed by a small portion of the inhabitants of our small planet. It may be supposed with what pomp and circumstance the Holy Church received this beloved daughter into her bosom. Nothing could exceed the general gratification.

Lady Ramsay's charity was profuse, her piety splendid. The whole conclave was at her feet. She founded a convent, and endowed it magnificently; the united sisterhood revered her as a saint. Some of them whispered that she possessed the power of working miracles; and when she settled her whole fortune upon the convent, it was rumoured that she had received from his Holiness a promise of future canonization.

Arethusa quarrelled and made it up so

often with Harry Preston, that Lady Ramsay finally lost patience, and refused to interfere further in their conjugal bickerings. Lady Ramsay was, indeed, so completely engrossed by spiritual concerns, that she could not be supposed to have either time or inclination for those temporal. Duty, of course, yielded to devotion. Mrs. Tyrrell, who had relapsed into inactivity, was, by her elder daughter's neglect, once more roused in favour of the younger. Again she showed symptoms of vitality, and spoke to Arethusa with such good sense, and, at the same time, with such kindness, that the latter (her ringlets having grown as beautiful as ever) was really touched, and behaved much better for the future.

Frank's deep and unchangeable affection enabled Isabella to recover from the shock she sustained by Chloe's sad death. Theirs was happiness as unmixed as ever fell to mortal lot. No doubt an occasional shadow was cast over the brightness of their long day; but they sorrowed together, and each trial served to increase their affection and heighten their trust.

Madame Rodostomus continued to meet

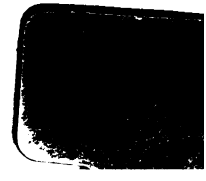
with extraordinary adventures, and to be persecuted by disastrous ill-luck. Her daughter and son-in-law listened to the facetious lamentations in which she loved to indulge, with a forbearance so provoking as very naturally to rouse the widow's indignation. She pined, left off complaining, became silent and low-spirited, and seemed altogether in a dangerous way. Fortunately, however, a little granddaughter, named Chloe, soon grew old enough to chatter and contradict, and excite the old lady's ire at least twenty times a day. From that moment she rallied, her health improved, and she became as chirupy and as unaccountably unfortunate as ever.

We were wrong in asserting that there is no such thing on earth as unmixed happiness. Aurora's knew no alloy. She had twelve children in ten years, six of them twin daughters. If her boys were unruly, she sagaciously observed that "Boys would be boys!" If her girls were ugly, she confidentially whispered that "Beauties didn't always marry first; she knew better." Her parish school increased in numbers and in

insubordination; she had more superannuated old women and more disabled young men on her hands than any other clergyman's wife in the kingdom: she gave bales of needlework to women who couldn't sew, and acres of ground to men who wouldn't dig. Delightfully fatiguing were those days on which she made her parish rounds, inspecting the work which was not done. But the proudest and happiest moment of her life was that when she appeared at a county ball with her six daughters, all grown up, and each noticed, one after the other, by the great lady of the neighbourhood as living images of their mamma.

One word more touching the fate of Charles, our hero. His despair at Chloe's death need not be dwelt upon. For some time it threatened his reason. He threw up his post at Paris, and embarked for a long voyage, in hopes of meeting with some violent death. To his dismay, the vessel, having doubled Cape Horn, landed him safe on the western coast of America. He travelled across the continent, expecting to be cut off by yellow fever, but he was again disappointed; and, touching at Jamaica

on his way home, he became casually acquainted with a creole lady of moderate charms, but of large possessions, and was by her persuaded to become a little more reconciled to life. A vessel from England brought out the report that his uncle was endeavouring to break the entail of the Overdale property, in order to disinherit him. Charles forthwith made proposals to the creole heiress, and was willingly accepted by her. He returned with his bride to England. On landing, he heard the news of Lord Overdale's sudden death. Having left no will, Charles was naturally his universal heir. The young lord took a house in London, and became exclusively the fashion. He threw himself into politics, and soon became influential. In due time, he was entrusted with various important diplomatic missions, and at last attained the summit of his ambition, and was named ambassador at Paris. He was rich, and powerful, and envied. Was he happy? He was eminently successful.

THE END.

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